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# identity®

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## The New Culture Issue

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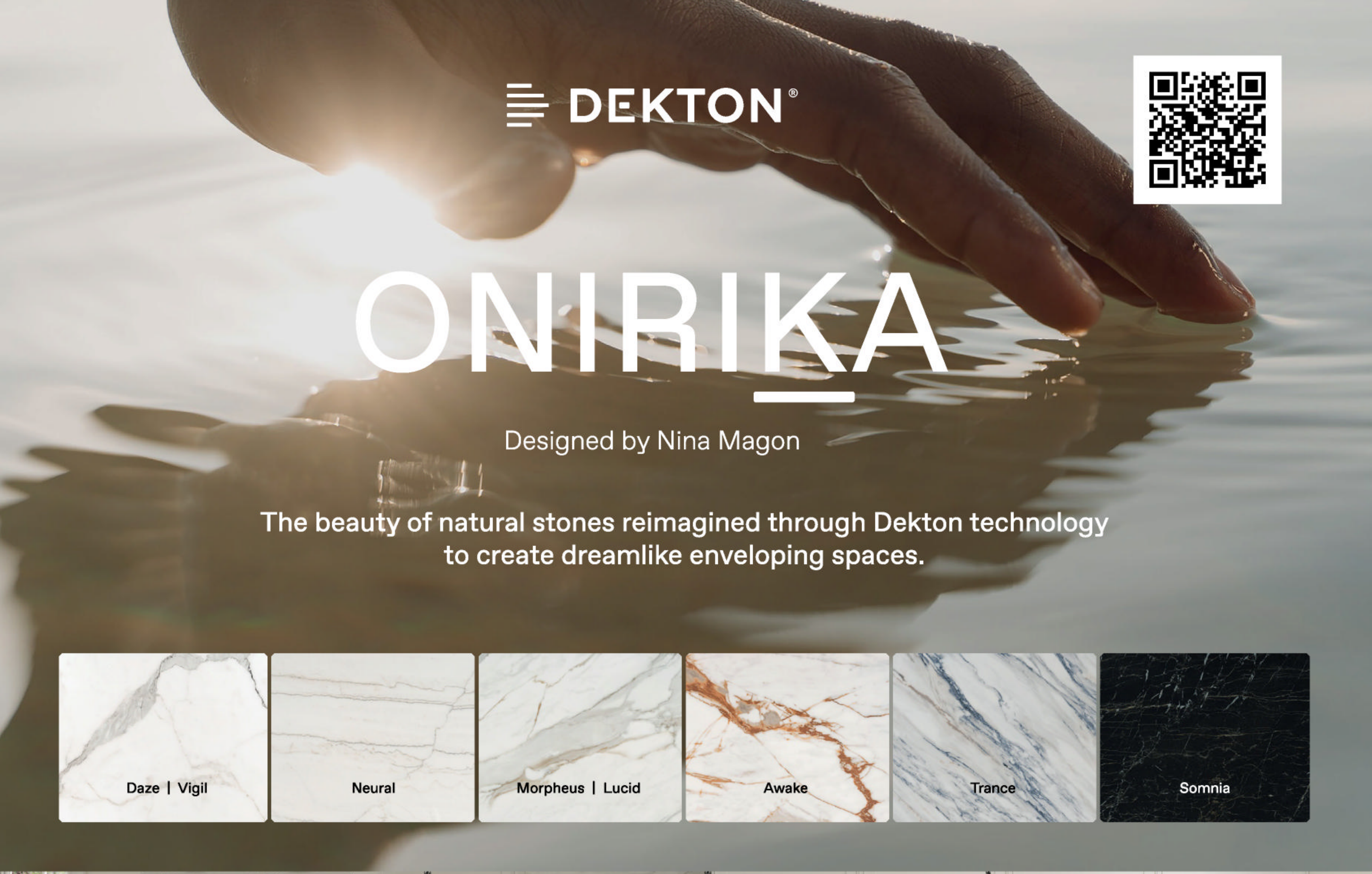
Photography by Hannah Perez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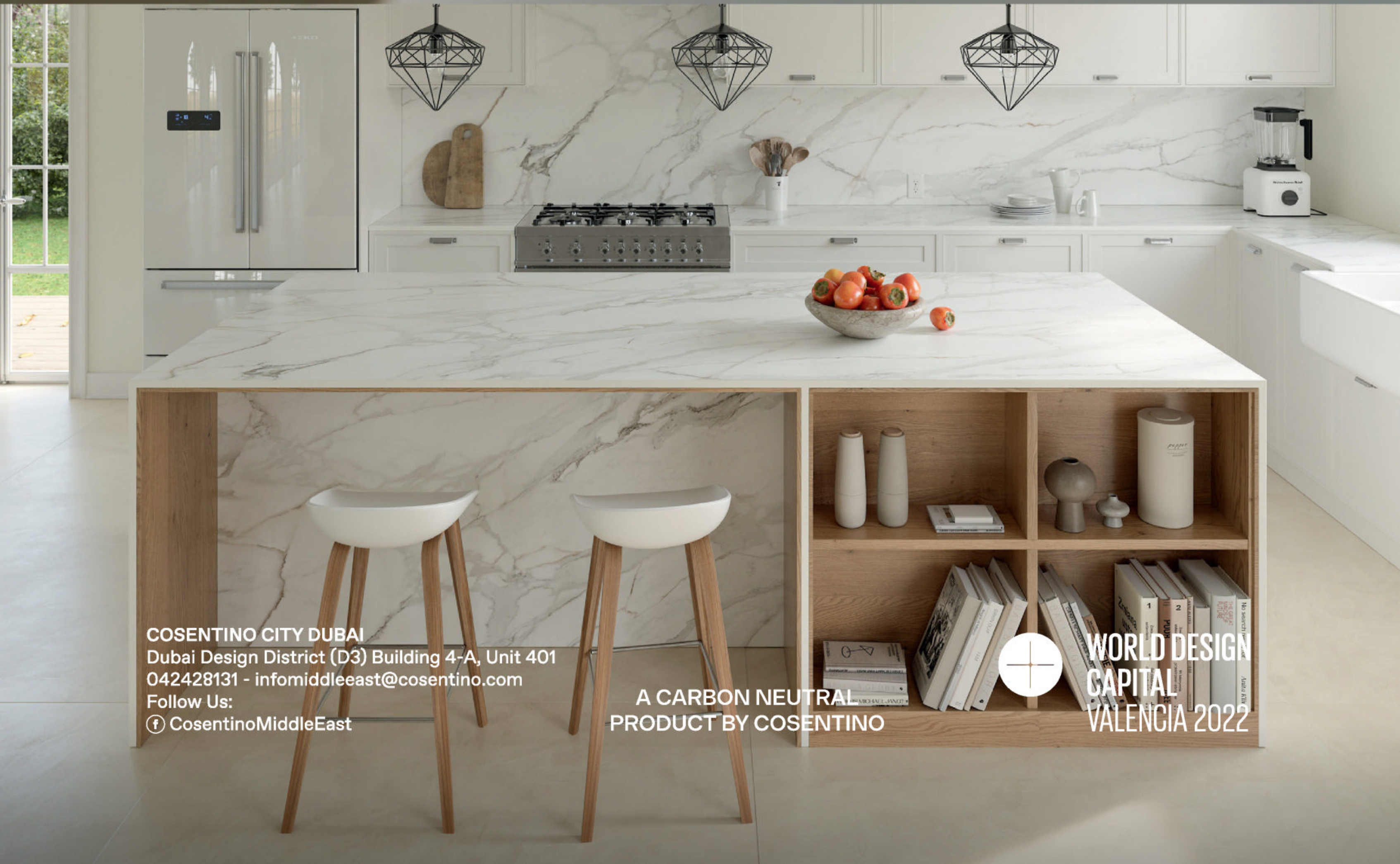

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# Editor's Note

A few weeks ago, I was having a conversation with a friend who loosely observed that we have more time today than ever before to contemplate topics that many generations before us didn't have the luxury to ponder. One such topic, he said, is identity – or the feeling of belongingness and alienation one feels within a perceived identity of self or others. This made us reflect on how important identity is today and the many facets of it. One that stood out the most was cultural identity, or how we relate (or don't relate) to our cultures of origin and to our adopted cultures, usually as a result of relocation. With many people today identifying as Third Culture Kids (TCKs), it is no wonder that culture and identity have become such hot conversational topics.

While putting together this issue, I realised this topic is just as apparent in the design field as it is anywhere else. Many of the designers and artists that I interviewed spoke extensively about identity, specifically in the way it relates to culture.

Artist and photographer Hassan Hajjaj, who co-curated last year's edition of cultural festival Sole DXB, spoke about the important role of culture in his work, which almost subconsciously materialised from his nostalgic memories of Morocco, where he was born and raised before moving to London at the age of 12. "When you leave your country for too long the country moves on, but you are still left with the memories of when you left. So, I think my work started from a place of nostalgia," he said.

This month's cover features Nada Debs – who most likely needs no further introduction. Debs' 20-year career has helped put the region's contemporary design on the global map. However, the designer is no stranger to struggling with identity, which eventually ended up fuelling the work we all know and love today.

Having grown up in Japan, and educated in the West, Debs felt that for the longest time she was seeing her own Arab identity through the eyes of an outsider. Failing to find a contemporary Arab identity in furniture design further isolated her upon arriving in Beirut in 2000. This is where she began her journey, eventually resulting in works that integrate a myriad of crafts from the region in a contemporary manner, using modern materials and minimal shapes and patterns. She told me during our interview that she wanted to define a new approach in regional design, called 'Neo Arabian', showcasing a modern Arab design language.

"[I call it] Neo-Arabian because it's from our part of the world and it's new. It gives confidence to who we are," she explained. "To me, the biggest compliment is not making money; but it is when people say 'You have made us proud' because we are making things that we want people to be proud of. It comes from our region. It is ours.

"And this feeling of pride is a beautiful feeling. It's where my complex about identity [stems from]. I didn't know who I was. So, this has helped define me. I am both: I am Japanese, and I am Arab. I don't have to choose. And I think that today, many people reflect this duality, and that's why they can relate to what I do. My furniture has a sense of identity to it, and I think that's my take on furniture: identity, material and craft."

I hope everyone enjoys this first issue of the new year and I look forward to telling many more stories from the world of design, as we navigate what I hope is an eventful (and peaceful) 2023.

Photography by Oscar Munar

**On the cover:**
Nada Debs in her Dubai home wearing Bottega Veneta Spring 23 collection

Photo by Young Habibti

**Aidan Imanova**
Editor

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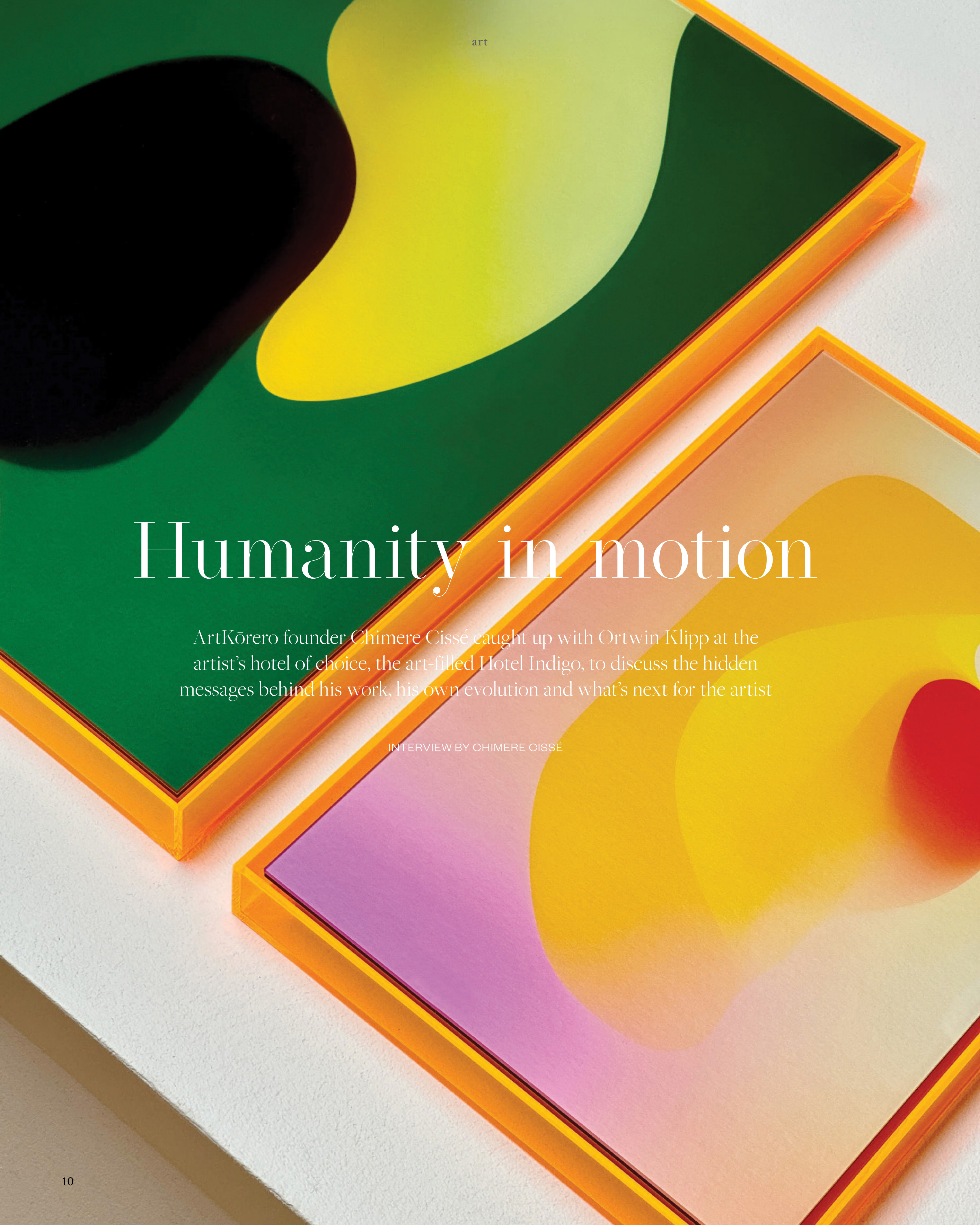
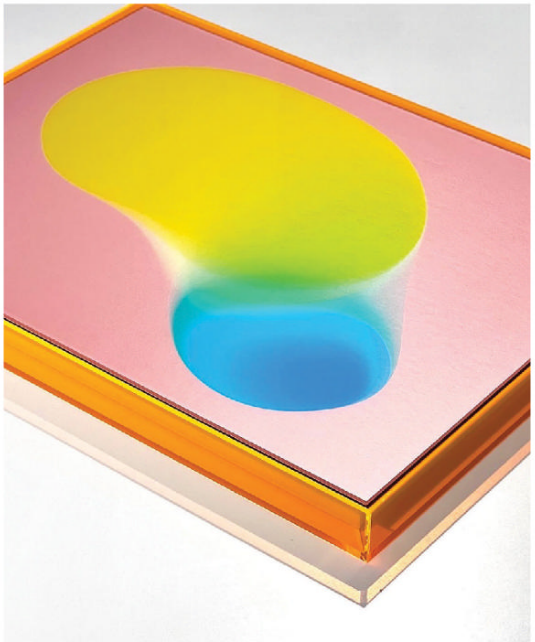


# Humanity in motion

ArtKōrero founder Chimere Cissé caught up with Ortwin Klipp at the artist's hotel of choice, the art-filled Hotel Indigo, to discuss the hidden messages behind his work, his own evolution and what's next for the artist

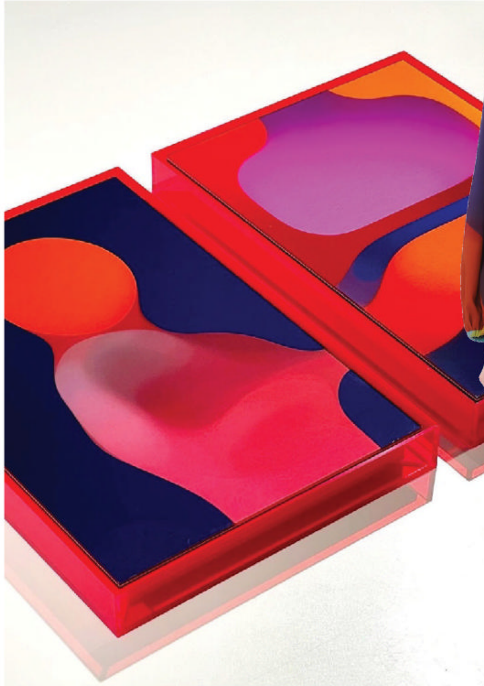
INTERVIEW BY CHIMERE CISSÉ



German artist Ortwin Klipp made his UAE debut during the 2022 edition of Dubai Design Week, bringing his exhibition, 'EVOLUTION', to the city. ArtKōrero, in partnership with *identity* magazine and Baituti Home, showcased a series of ethereal, hyper-pigmented works by the creative mind, displaying the raw talent of the Munich-based artist.

**Your work is about human evolution; how does this translate into your practice?** Our fast-moving world is constantly in motion and changing. We are all part of it and contribute to this natural process. Everything is in motion. Standing still means going backwards. Evolution is like a river that flows inexorably forward, which is what I named my photo series. These artworks are based on portraits of people, most of them friends and acquaintances of mine. Their individuality is made unrecognisable, and the artworks appear abstract. It is a process of change and fluid transformation. The bright colours testify to the positivity of this process.

**You left Romania at the age of 13, a very impressionable age for a child, to move to Germany. What memories do you have of your time in the country?** I remember my childhood very fondly. My grandmother lived in the middle of the Carpathians. Spending a lot of time with her and in the nature of Romania shaped me as a person. She influenced me with her sensitivity and knowledge. The move to Germany was a little bit sad for this reason, but on the other hand it was a new adventure that I really looked forward to. I've always been an explorer and not afraid of change. All the places I have lived in and the people I met on this journey have influenced and shaped me to be the person I am today – and that has also shaped my work as an artist.



**'EVOLUTION' is your first solo exhibition in the Middle East. How do you feel about being able to present your work in this region? And what are you looking forward to the most?** Creating my artworks and my work in general brings me a lot of joy and happiness. I would like to share this feeling with my audience. That's why I am very excited to present my works in the Middle East and share my work and passion with people from this region. Sharing joy is a very important element for me in my life.

**The medium you work in is very interesting and one that I believe you have been using since 2004, which started this process. How has it changed over time?** I have never changed my method of production through all these years, I have only improved and refined it. There are some new additions – like colour cycles – that you can observe in my artworks, but it's all an improvement of the technique.

**What is the message you want to convey to viewers of your art; what question would you like to ask them about the work and yourself?** We are all part of our evolution. Each of us is part of it and has had an influence on it. This understanding is very important to me, and I would like to carry this a little further through my pictures.

**What are your future plans; will you get into NFTs? Tell us about your digital artwork.** The new technologies fascinate me. They offer a lot of possibilities to dive into new dimensions. I would love to get involved in NFTs and move forward and develop as an artist in this area. I have already worked on some AR (augmented reality) art projects. The next step for me will be NFTs. I love the idea of connecting the physical world with the digital world. I can say that my artworks will see a 'technical evolution'.

*'EVOLUTION' is now on display at luxury furniture showroom Baituti Home and will run throughout January 2023.*

# Tactile memories

Italian artist Paola Anziché's residency with Loro Piana at Tashkeel investigates the heritage of the UAE through textiles

WORDS BY AIDAN IMANOVA

Exploring the intersections of heritage, culture and nature, Turin-based artist Paola Anziché has applied her research-led practice to create a new series of textile sculptures and forms for her four-month residency at Tashkeel, in collaboration with fashion house Loro Piana under the Tashkeel Residency programme.

A textile expert in her own right, Anziché used Loro Piana raw fibres – off-cuts sourced from its factories including wool, cashmere, silk and lotus flower – and intersected them with traditional local fabrics and materials that are closely linked to the heritage of the UAE.

"'Seeing with your hands' is the expression with which I define my artistic practice, where every work, every sculpture, is created by experimenting with different weaving and interweaving techniques," the artist tells *identity*. "The preparation for such manual practice involves the collection of texts and images, which in turn leads me to create a sort of archive to feed my research.

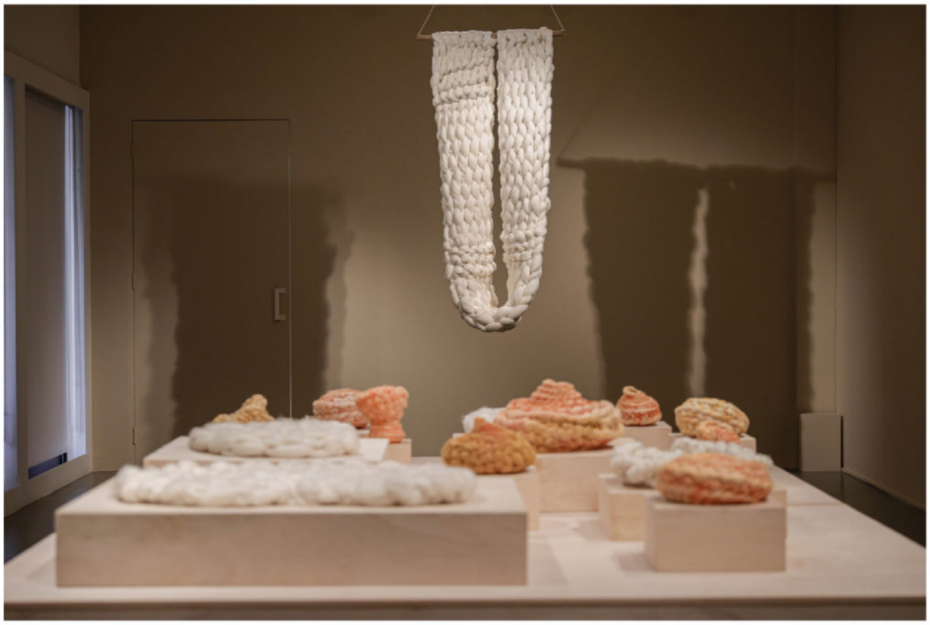
"My interest in the gestural aspects of weaving stems from an intention to reproduce (and reinterpret) the purity of a non-verbal language that has been developed over time and communicated through the action of hands… Every material is chosen for its precise physical characteristics. These influence both the design process and the creative methods used. In doing so, it is possible to retrace the history, the original context and, in some way, the uniqueness of each fibre," she says.

Her body of work at Tashkeel, titled 'Entwined Matter', investigates what, to the artist, is the 'hidden' culture that surrounds Dubai and beyond. She explored traditional architecture and archaeological locations across the Emirates and became introduced to the those safeguarding the art of traditional crafts through the Bidwa Social Development Programme, a centre in Dibba Al Hisn run by Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council.

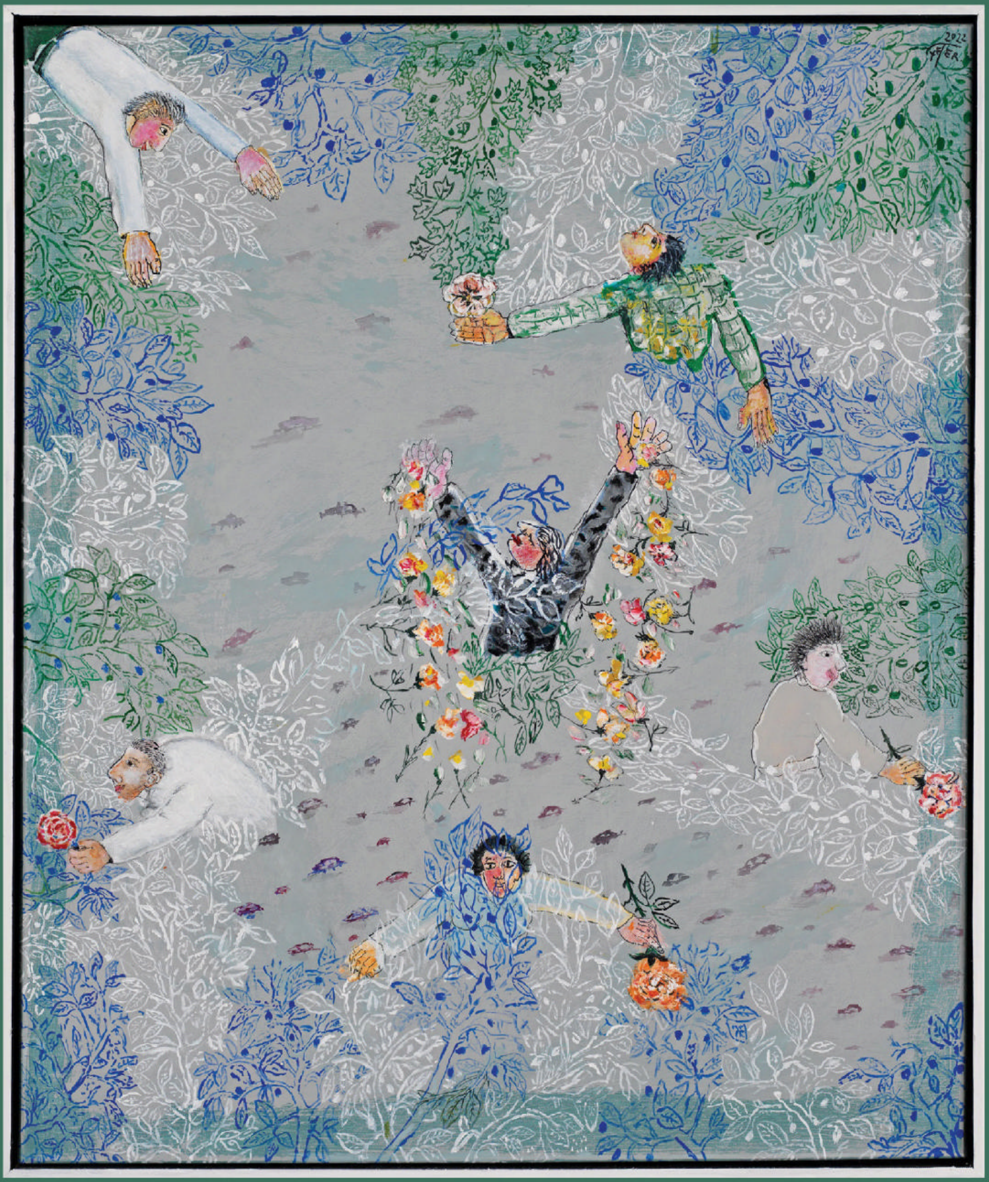
"By carefully observing places and environments, I discovered a wealth of references implicit in them: the large corals traditionally used as bricks in the buildings of Al Hamra Village, Ras Al Khaimah (precious fractal geometries); the varying shades of sand (especially noticeable at sunset) at Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain; the chromatic variations of the sands at Meliha Archaeological Centre and Buhais Geology Park in Sharjah; as well as the suggestive 'crusts' of sand and salt found in the salt lakes ('sabkha' in Arabic) of Al Wathba, Abu Dhabi," Anziché shares.

As a result, the artist has integrated elements of the region into the textiles and fibres: she used spices as a symbol of the ancient relationships and trading routes between the UAE and its neighbouring countries; salt, referring to the importance of obtaining drinkable water through desalination as well as references to the salt lake (sabkha) formations in the desert; and 'the sun' which, she says, plays an active role in marrying the spices and the fabrics, as well as in combining the salt.

Another active component in the artist's work is the connection between the pieces and their audiences: "The bond between the body and the work is a constant in my practice," says Anziché. "I often choose to place the viewer close to a piece so that it forms an experience in their memory. The viewers must be able to pass through, climb over, lean on and touch [the work]."



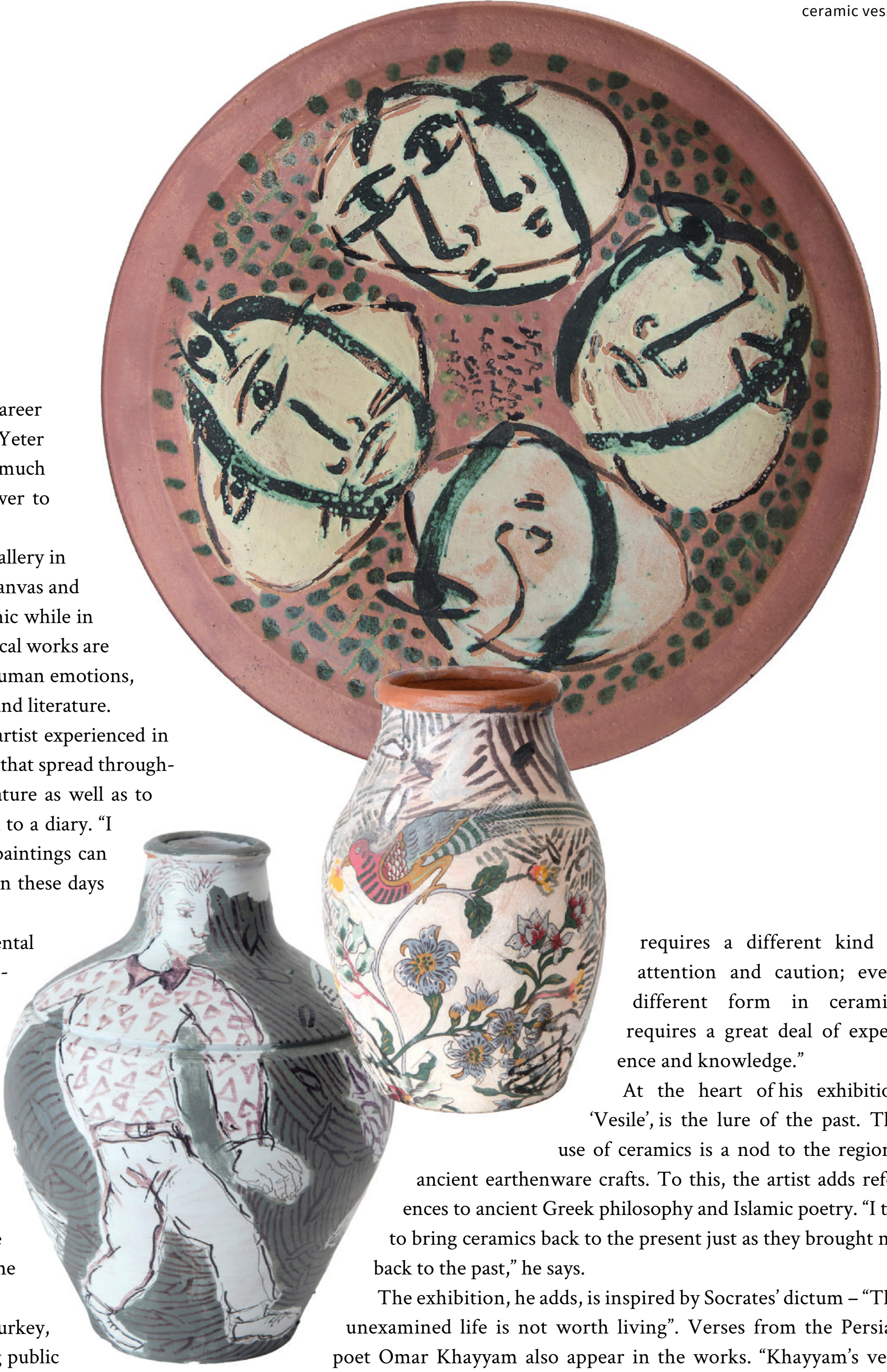
# From canvas to clay



Istanbul-based artist Hanefi Yeter explores pandemic isolation and environmental collapse through painting and pottery

WORDS BY LEMMA SHEHADI

Previous page: 'Gül Kopardım', 2022, Acrylic on canvas. This page, from top: 'Untitled', 1997, Glazed ceramic plate. 'Untitled', Acrylic on ceramic vessel. 'Untitled', Acrylic on ceramic vessel



When asked to reflect on an artistic career spanning five decades, Hanefi Yeter remains aloof. "Art expects too much from the artist," he tells *identity*. "My real answer to this question is hidden in the future."

For his latest exhibition at the Anna Laudel gallery in Istanbul, the Turkish artist presents works on canvas and ceramic, which he produced during the pandemic while in social isolation. These highly decorative and lyrical works are replete with celebratory images of nature and human emotions, as well as references to philosophy, mythology and literature.

Yet they also express the loneliness that the artist experienced in these testing times. "These fearful, anxious days that spread throughout human life made us more connected to nature as well as to ourselves," he says. As such, he likens the work to a diary. "I tried to note these days in my art so that my paintings can refresh and remind the collective memory when these days are over."

One central theme is the artist's environmental concerns. "I want to raise awareness of the damage done to nature by human beings as a result of the development and changes in life," he says. Nature appears in the form of ornamental fruits, butterflies and tropical plants. Primitive human figures in the painted works appear to celebrate nature's diversity while lamenting its loss.

A series of colourful urns and bowls were painted, glazed and fired by the artist. The pottery was hand-picked by the artist from the Ayvalık region in north-western Turkey.

Throughout his career in Germany and in Turkey, Yeter has worked in a range of media, including public murals and sculpture. He maintains that the form and content of an artwork determines the choice of medium. "Different materials, techniques and changing conditions lead me and my works to change. I make a lot of effort in this regard."

Yet the transition from canvas to clay is not easy, he adds. "The artist needs the knowledge and experience of various types of techniques: from glazing to working with mud and voluminous forms, firing superficial areas," he says. "Working on a voluminous surface requires a different kind of attention and caution; every different form in ceramics requires a great deal of experience and knowledge."

At the heart of his exhibition, 'Vesile', is the lure of the past. The use of ceramics is a nod to the region's ancient earthenware crafts. To this, the artist adds references to ancient Greek philosophy and Islamic poetry. "I try to bring ceramics back to the present just as they brought me back to the past," he says.

The exhibition, he adds, is inspired by Socrates' dictum – "The unexamined life is not worth living". Verses from the Persian poet Omar Khayyam also appear in the works. "Khayyam's verses from centuries ago are the answer to the problems in today's Turkey," he says.

Yeter describes the exhibition as socially engaged: "I hope that the exhibition will lead people to think about issues [around] the environment, relationships, time, love and many human feelings," he says. Yet underlying this is a firm belief in the power of beauty and wonder that is evoked by art. "I want my works to give people a sense of ecstasy," he adds, "to enrich their spiritual world."

# Cultural movement

Celebrating its 10-year anniversary, contemporary culture festival Sole DXB collaborated with artist Hassan Hajjaj to turn its lens back on the region

WORDS BY AIDAN IMANOVA

Photography by Ismail Zaidy

Casting its gaze across global sub-cultures has become commonplace for Sole DXB – a festival in Dubai celebrating art, fashion, music and sneaker culture. From Tokyo to Kingston, Jamaica, each year highlights the multiple facets of a place and its culture. For its 10-year anniversary, the team at Sole DXB brought the story home by celebrating excellence across the Arab world and its diaspora, solidified by a collaboration with multidisciplinary artist and photographer Hassan Hajjaj as its first festival host.

"Hassan is representative of the culture for us, being of Moroccan origin and living in the UK and building a scene out there. His approach – not only towards his work but [also] to the people around him – has definitely been one of my biggest inspirations. We know him as someone who lifts up everyone around him," says Joshua Cox, Sole DXB's co-founder.

"Our journey always begins with going to the place that we want to represent, and here, we wanted to represent home, the Arab world and its diaspora. And while we picked key stories of the Arab world, we also know that they are all quite different from each other. Hassan's language is a contemporary take that covers a wide spectrum so, again, he was the perfect choice in our eyes to be able to tell that story visually."

Hajjaj was born in the fishing town of Larache, Morocco in 1961 and moved to London at the age of 12. "That has given me different points of view about my culture and living in the West," he tells *identity*. Hajjaj is what one would call a multihyphenate. Starting out in the underground club culture in London, creating interesting spaces out of illegal locations and warehouses, he later created a streetwear brand called R.A.P. (Real Artistic People), where he hosted art shows for his friends, many of whom were also third culture kids, like Hajjaj himself.

"I started, I supposed, accidentally. I didn't study art or think of becoming an artist. It just happened along the way," he says. Hajjaj's work has become emblematic of a contemporary Arab identity, a message that he wanted to convey to his friends in London, where associations with Morocco were limited to camels, the Sahara Desert and drugs. "I wanted Morocco and the Arab countries to be seen as cool, because we had the coolness and the sexiness and I wanted to show it," he says. His first project, 'Graphics from the Souk' featured recycled road signs, light boxes turned into tables and Coca-Cola crates. "It started to become noticed as art and I found it uneasy at first, to find myself being an artist and doing that first body of work, because I didn't know if it was just a fun thing. I always thought to be an artist you have to be serious." ▸▸

INFORMATION

Previous page: Hassan Hajjaj for Sole DXB. Right: Riad Yima at Sole DXB

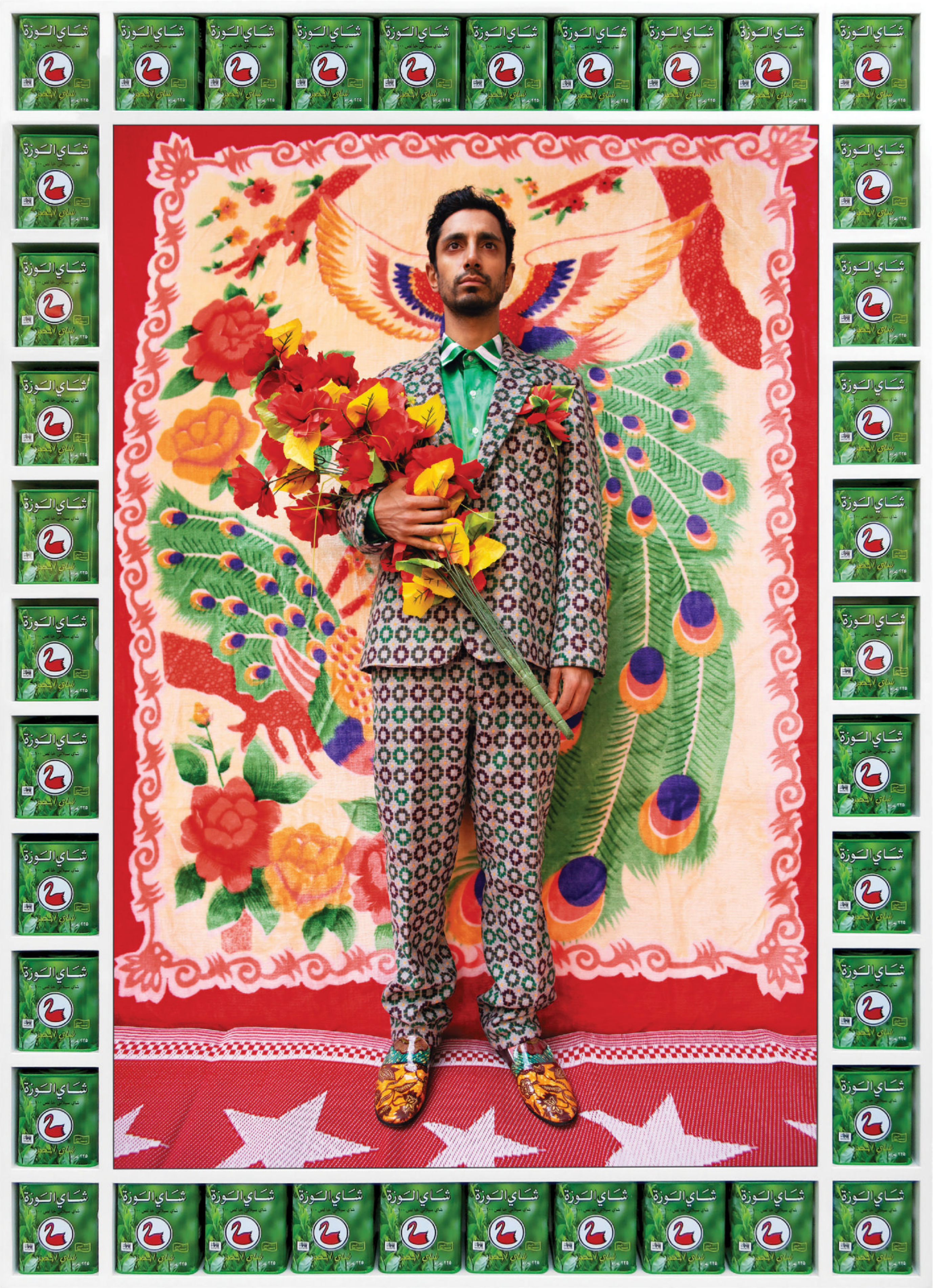
Photography by Aidan Imanova

This page, from top: Hassan Hajjaj with Yussef Dayes. Entrance gate at Sole DXB. Next page: Riz Ahmed by Hassan Hajjaj

For Sole DXB, Hajjaj worked with Cox and his team as well as artist Ebon Heath to recreate his riad in Marrakesh – Riad Yima – within the festival grounds, featuring the same courtyard where he styles his signature photoshoots, with friends and celebrities dressed in colourful, patterned prints and framed by cans of Harissa and Coca-Cola bottles. In addition to this, the team also created an entrance reminiscent of traditional Moroccan architecture – but contemporary in its iteration.

"The idea was to create something fun, try to use all the materials that I work with and the architecture that I grew up with, playing with round and square shapes. We didn't want to make it too much of a caricature…so we took something classic and something contemporary and mixed them together."

In as much as fun and play are at the core of Hajjaj's practice, the work is never devoid of meaning. "I believe that art can move us forward," he says. "It can dispel stereotypes. I believe in our youth and the next generation of creators that are showing us that we aren't just consumers of the culture but are actively contributing to it."



Residents of the Misk Art Institute's local residency "Masaha Residency" cycle four

Photograph courtesy of Misk Art Institute

# Shaping memory

Memory, vernacular traditions and urban transformation feature at Misk Art Week, a week-long arts platform in the Saudi capital of Riyadh

WORDS BY LEMMA SHEHADI

Ghassan Omair's installation, at Masaha Residency cycle four

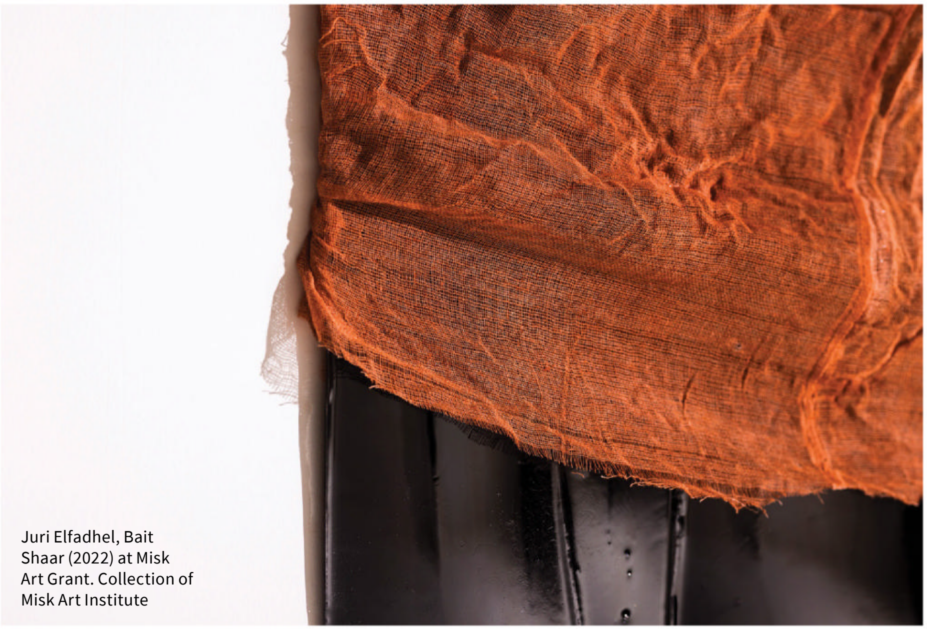
Photograph courtesy of Misk Art Institute

When you're surrounded by change, the memory of a place can be a useful way to think about the future, says Fatima Al Doukhi, a young architect based in Riyadh. "Our memories are associated with places and buildings, but our memory of a place loses accuracy," she tells *identity*. "These remembered forms can serve as architectural typologies for the future."

Al Doukhi is among a new generation of artists and designers from Saudi Arabia who are exploring how the Kingdom's rapid transformations are impacting memory – whether collective or individual – and society. Their work was unveiled at Misk Art Week, a week-long celebration of art and design organised by the Misk Art Institute, a non-profit arts centre in Riyadh.

To express her ideas, Al Doukhi created models for futuristic buildings based on her memory of historic or iconic places in the Kingdom. Among these was a wave-like structure based on a one-minute sketch from memory of the Tuwaiq Palace, a modern architectural landmark in Riyadh. Al Doukhi developed this work during a three-month artistic residency at Misk.

This year, the residency programme focused on the intersections of art and design, by inviting nine designers and one writer. "There is an interesting conversation going on in Saudi Arabia and the regional scene where art intersects with design," says Nawaf Alharbi, Misk's Director of Strategy and Development. "We don't have a lot of university arts education in Saudi, so a lot of people with an interest in the arts study design instead." ▸▸



Juri Elfadhel, Bait Shaar (2022) at Misk Art Grant. Collection of Misk Art Institute

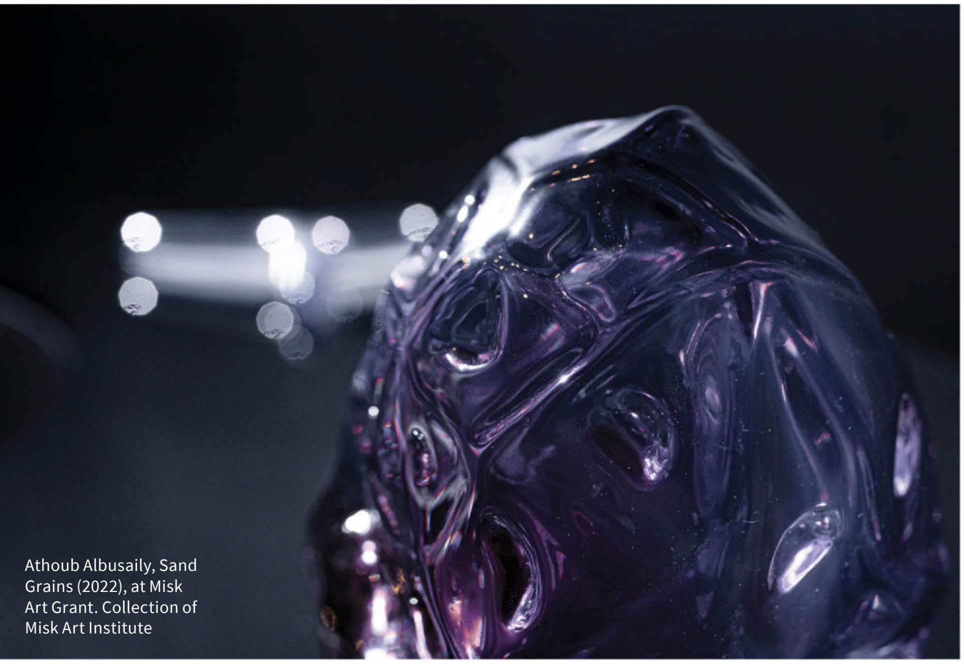
Other residents explored questions around the built environment and sustainability. Lighting designer Abeer AlRabiah created a chandelier from reclaimed wood that had been used for moulding concrete. "The sculptural light highlights the evanescence of memory," she explains. Ghassan Omair, in turn, created a puppet show from discarded wood that he'd collected from the streets of Riyadh. "Trees have memories encoded in their genes. Seedlings learn how to deal with drought and disease," he says. "But in my neighbourhood, they keep cutting down trees."

At Misk Art Week's 'Azeema' exhibition, 10 artists from the GCC reflected on the Arab tradition of hospitality – known colloquially as the *azeema* or invitation – in light of the rapid changes taking place in the region. "The exhibition explores the dynamics of collective memory by examining different components, memories and ideologies in and around the *azeema* phenomenon," says Basma Alshathry, Acting Curatorial Director at Misk Art Institute. Additionally, Saudi artist Filwa Nazer's labour-intensive collages bring together children's books from the 1970s and '80s, with family photographs and textual references to patriarchy and conservatism.

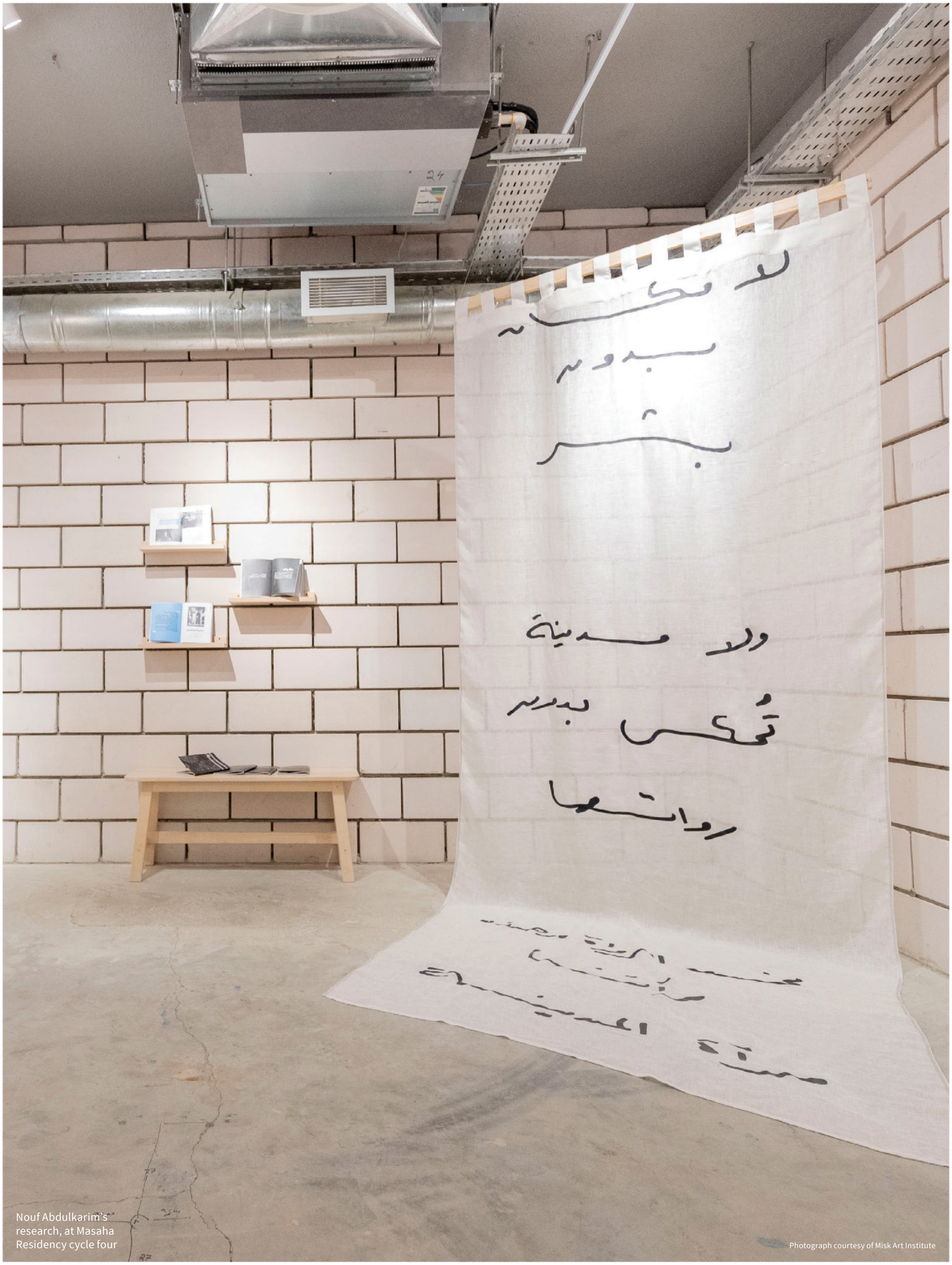
Recipients of the Misk Art Grant, an annual programme which supports mid-career and emerging artists, also unveiled their new works with installations exploring modernity and the vernacular. Juri Al Fadhel, an architect by training, explores the social implications of rapid urban changes in Saudi Arabia. Her minimalist piece, 'Bait Shaar' (2022), is a slate of black epoxy that has been partially covered by a thin layer of mud-dyed fabric. Light pierces through a tear in the resin to comment on the built environment in Saudi Arabia, while the fabric references the collective tent weaving of Bedouin women.

London-based Saudi artist Abdel Mohsen Al Binali's series of works explores oral folklore traditions and their connections to nature. "There was a lot of storytelling in my family when I was growing up. Women played an important role as purveyors of this tradition," he says. Among the works in the series is 'Maternal Metamorphosis' (2022), a small hut made of dried reed and twigs, with an audio recording of 10 people telling their household's version of the same story. "The primitive structure alludes to the ancient roots of oral folklore, while also gesturing to its ever-changing nature. The recordings rotate through a speaker while holding a common thread between them," he explains.

Outside, the platform's Art and Design market provided free booths to over 80 designers and artists via an open call. Abdul Rahman Al Sirri, an architect by training, presented his posters of iconic buildings from Riyadh's architectural history, documenting the city's changes from 1924 to the present day. "I wanted to showcase some of the hidden architectural gems we have in Riyadh, explain their stories, and how they play an integral role in the history of the city in a simple artistic way," he says.



Athoub Albusaily, Sand Grains (2022), at Misk Art Grant. Collection of Misk Art Institute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Nouf Abdulkarim's research, at Masaha Residency cycle four

Photograph courtesy of Misk Art Institute

# Elemental design

A landmark heritage conservation project in Saudi Arabia also has lessons for sustainability in contemporary architecture

WORDS BY LEMMA SHEHADI

In the central Najd region of Saudi Arabia, earth, water and sunlight were essential building tools. Though simple in origin, this age-old method of earthen architecture culminated in the construction of one of the Kingdom's most sophisticated heritage buildings: At-Turaif – an 18th-century palace complex that once served as the seat of the first Saudi state.

Last month, the UNESCO World Heritage site opened to the public for the first time, after a restoration campaign that lasted over 10 years. "It is a very large site, [covering] almost 300,000 square metres, and built entirely of earthen materials: mud bricks, mud layers, and stone masonry with mud mortar," says Paola Matilde Pesaresi, director of Heritage Management, Diriyah Gate Development Authority.

At-Turaif is of great significance for many Saudis and was established by Mohammed bin Saud in 1727. The palace was completed in 1766, shortly after bin Saud's death. An Ottoman assault in 1818 destroyed half of the complex, which is to this day still in a state of ruin.

The restoration campaign has now set a strong precedent for architectural heritage conservation in Saudi Arabia. "We use the criterion of 'minimum interventions' to preserve the integrity and authenticity of the site," explains Pesaresi. What's more, restorers worked by adapting traditional techniques that are still in use in the area today. "At-Turaif became an open-air laboratory to define the techniques to repair and preserve its earthen architecture," she adds.

While visitors can walk around the palace and its adjacent mosques and religious schools, the scars of the Ottoman wars will remain visible. "We are trying to carefully conserve the area of the site that has been untouched since 1818, by consolidating the ruins without any reconstruction," says Pesaresi. "This area represents an essential piece of the history of At-Turaif as a witness to the heroic defence of the city during the time of the first Saudi state."

Adobe structures like At-Turaif play an important role in conversations around sustainability in architecture. While the material wears more easily than stone and is more susceptible to earthquakes, it allows for natural insulation and makes use of a local and easily accessible material.

Pesaresi points to the many lessons that contemporary architects can learn from adobe buildings such as At-Turaif. "Traditional Najdi architecture is the expression of a society that has learned over the centuries to harmonise its response to a very harsh climate with cultural and societal requirements," she explains. "Around the world, we see increasing effort from architects to respond to similar needs, both in terms of climate that is changing quickly and dramatically, and in terms of accommodating social and cultural values typical of a specific region and country."

Large, thin walls create narrow winding roads that provide shade from the heat while reflecting the sunlight. The top edges of the fort and palace walls are lined with triangular windows – typical of the Najdi style – which allow for better air circulation as well as protection from outside attacks.

The restoration of At-Turaif is part of a wider development of the historic town of Diriyah. "The style of architecture and building techniques [at At-Turaif] are being adopted by Diriyah Gate Development Authority (DGDA) throughout the development of Diriyah – including some 180 million mudbricks currently being made by hand – hence ensuring its significance lives on," explains Pesaresi.

Today, Diriyah is being transformed into one of Saudi's main tourism destinations. The Burjaili Terrace, adjacent to At-Turaif, opened on the same week with Michelin-starred restaurants and Takya, a fine-dining experience for Saudi food.

For Pesaresi and her team, At-Turaif can serve as a living heritage that continually evolves over time. "It's not simply a copy-paste of the past," she says, "but a regeneration of the Najdi style and techniques to bring it into contemporary life."

# Artisanal futures

Beirut-based lighting designer Samer Saadeh is pushing the city's fragile metalworks industry in a contemporary direction

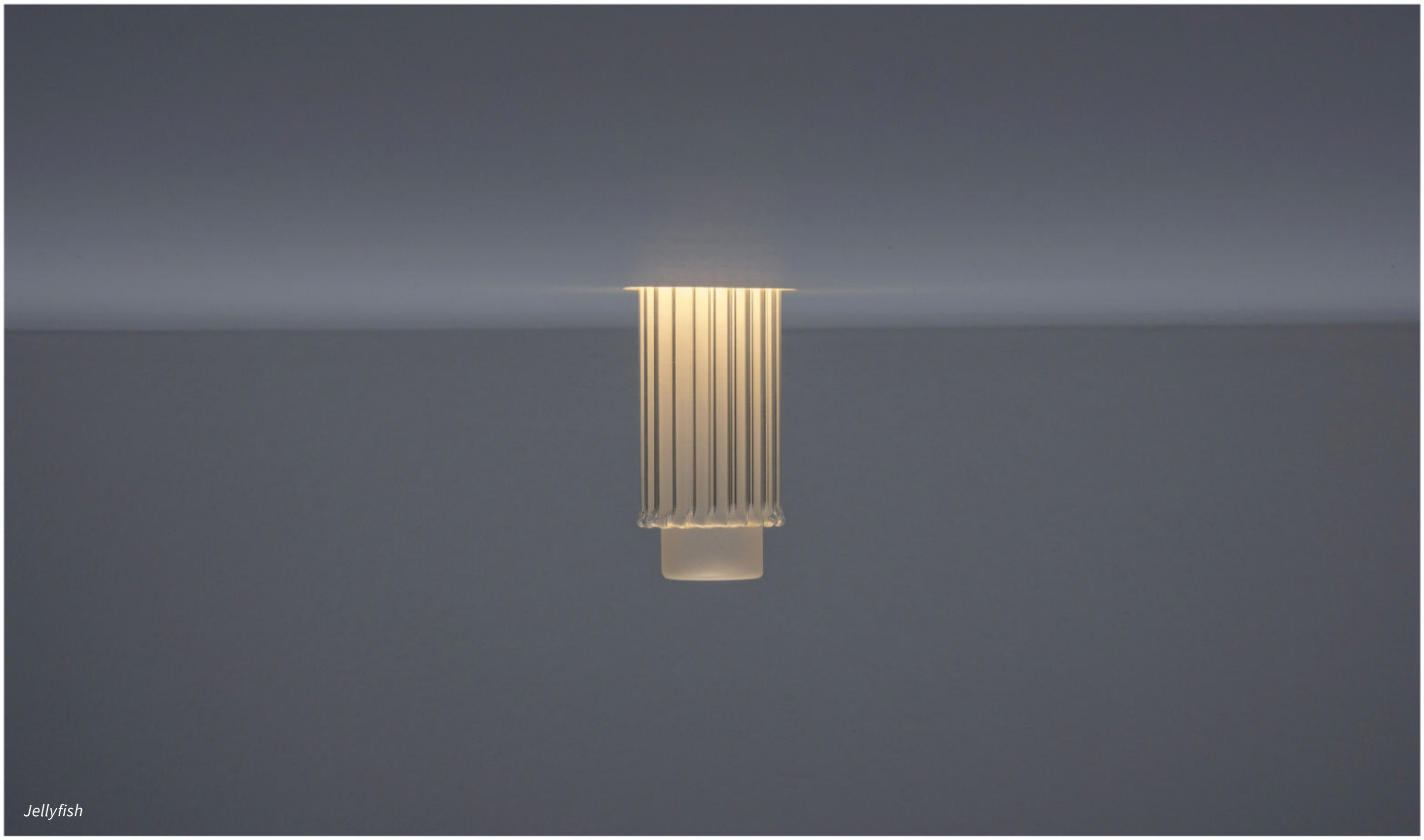
WORDS BY LEMMA SHEHADI

For Samer Saadeh, craftsmanship can contribute to more than just heritage, nostalgia and collectible objects. Since he founded his studio in Beirut in 2018, the architect-turned-lighting designer has shown that crafts can play a role in highly functional contemporary design solutions. "Lighting is needed for every project. We're offering lighting solutions to solve a problem," he says, contrasting this to the more decorative approaches to crafts.

His studio, Fabraca, is nestled in Sed Bouchrieh, Beirut's industrial quarter which is home to many of the city's craftsmen, whose specialisms range from metalwork to carpentry and textiles. From there, he works with a team of 12 craftsmen, mechanical engineers and architects on lighting projects in Lebanon and overseas, including the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris and the development of Qasr al Hosn in Abu Dhabi. "People tend to think that artisans and craftsmanship are dying out because of the ways in which we use technology and mass production in design," he says. "But the marriage between computer-generated designs and artisanal work is possible."

Among his more recent designs, 'Light Impact' (2022) is a contemporary rendition of the chandelier that mimics the fluid movement of a rope. It was designed for Karim Bekdache Studio, an architectural practice overlooking the Beirut port, to replace a blown glass collectible chandelier that had shattered during the August 4th explosion. ▸▸

Samer Saadeh at his workshop in Beirut



*Jellyfish*

"We tried to achieve the elegance of a chandelier with something as strong and robust as aluminium," Saadeh explains. The lighting frame is composed of modular aluminium cylinders that are connected by a spherical joint. "The mechanisms connecting one piece and the other achieve this rope-like effect. If another blast were to happen, the piece would withstand the shock because it is so flexible."

Each of the aluminium cylinders and connecting joints was handmade in Fabraca's studio. Saadeh developed the design with a team that includes mechanical engineers and metalworkers. "The engineering part that connects the pieces was computer-generated. We drew everything on a programme before going on to prototyping and going to the artisans with our drawings," he shares.

Functionality is key to Fabraca's approach. The studio's latest project, 'Belt Track' (2022), is a series of manually adjustable and attachable lighting frames which was developed for Qasr Al Hosn's upcoming cooking school at Erth. For this, Saadeh created lighting frames that are strapped onto the building's air conditioning vents pipes. "Air conditioning vents exist in every indoor space in the UAE. We tried to clean up the ceiling by integrating the lighting and ventilation layers," he explains. "Now you have less visible wiring, and a minimalist treatment of the ceiling." The model is flexible and easily scalable to fit the size of the space. "This gives the architect or the user a lot of flexibility," he adds.

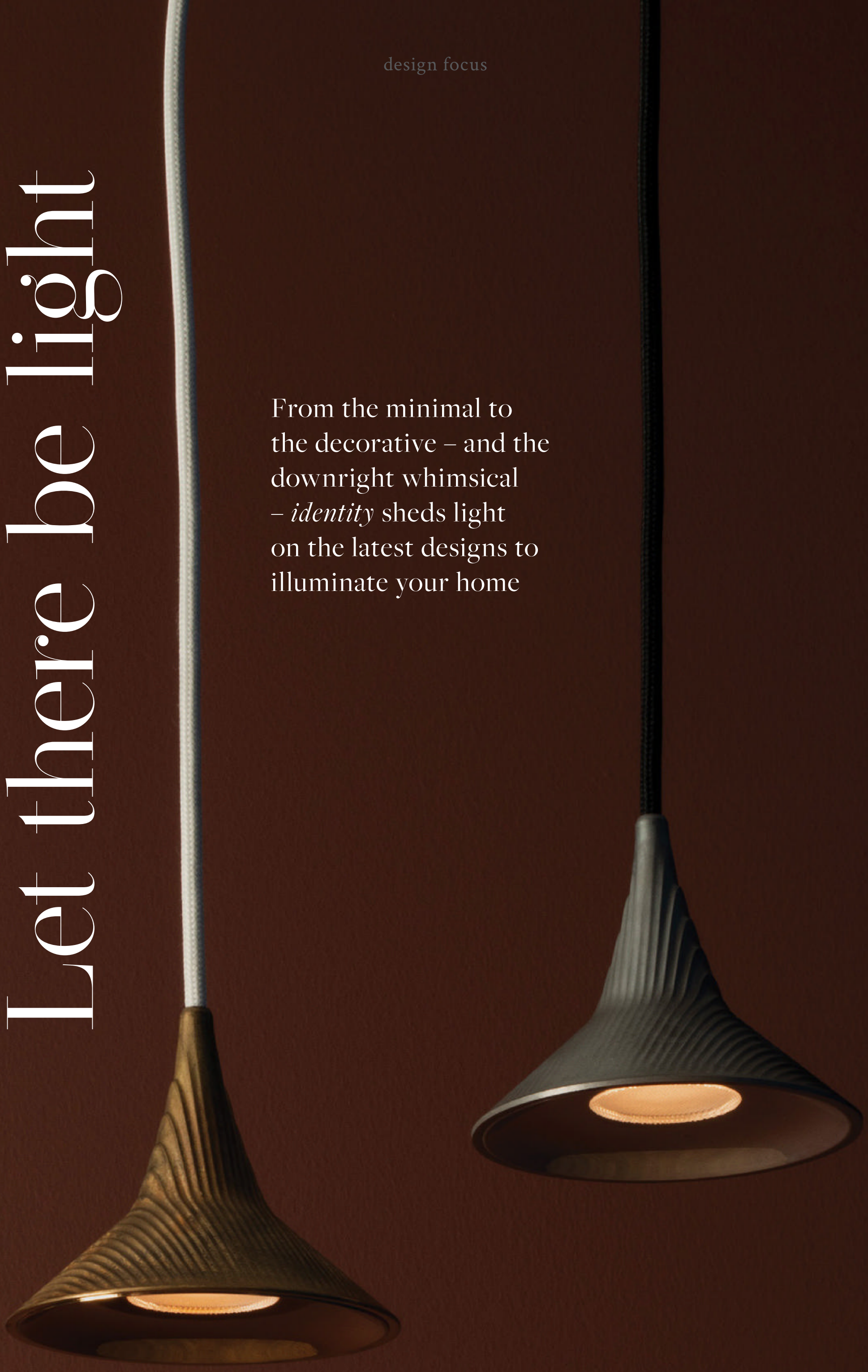
Saadeh sees it as Fabraca's mission to support local Lebanese craftsmanship, at a time when the country is experiencing economic and political collapse. He first encountered the industrious but fragile world of Beirut's craftsmen in 2013, when he was freelancing from a metalworks factory. "The artisans could produce such exclusive and beautiful detailing, but they weren't updating their product. They were still making things in the baroque style," he says. "They hadn't passed on the craft to their children. I really felt like we were losing these crafts."

When he established his own studio in 2018, he recruited many of these craftsmen, who had been left jobless after the factory's closure. Today, he employs a small team of metalworkers from the area and is also producing leather and blown glass products. His *Jellyfish* collection of mouth-blown glass light bulbs uses two layers of ribbed and tinted glass. *Saddle*, a wall-mounted light with a cone-shaped lampshade, was developed for a restaurant in Abu Dhabi, and includes a braided leather handle that allows the lamp to rotate.

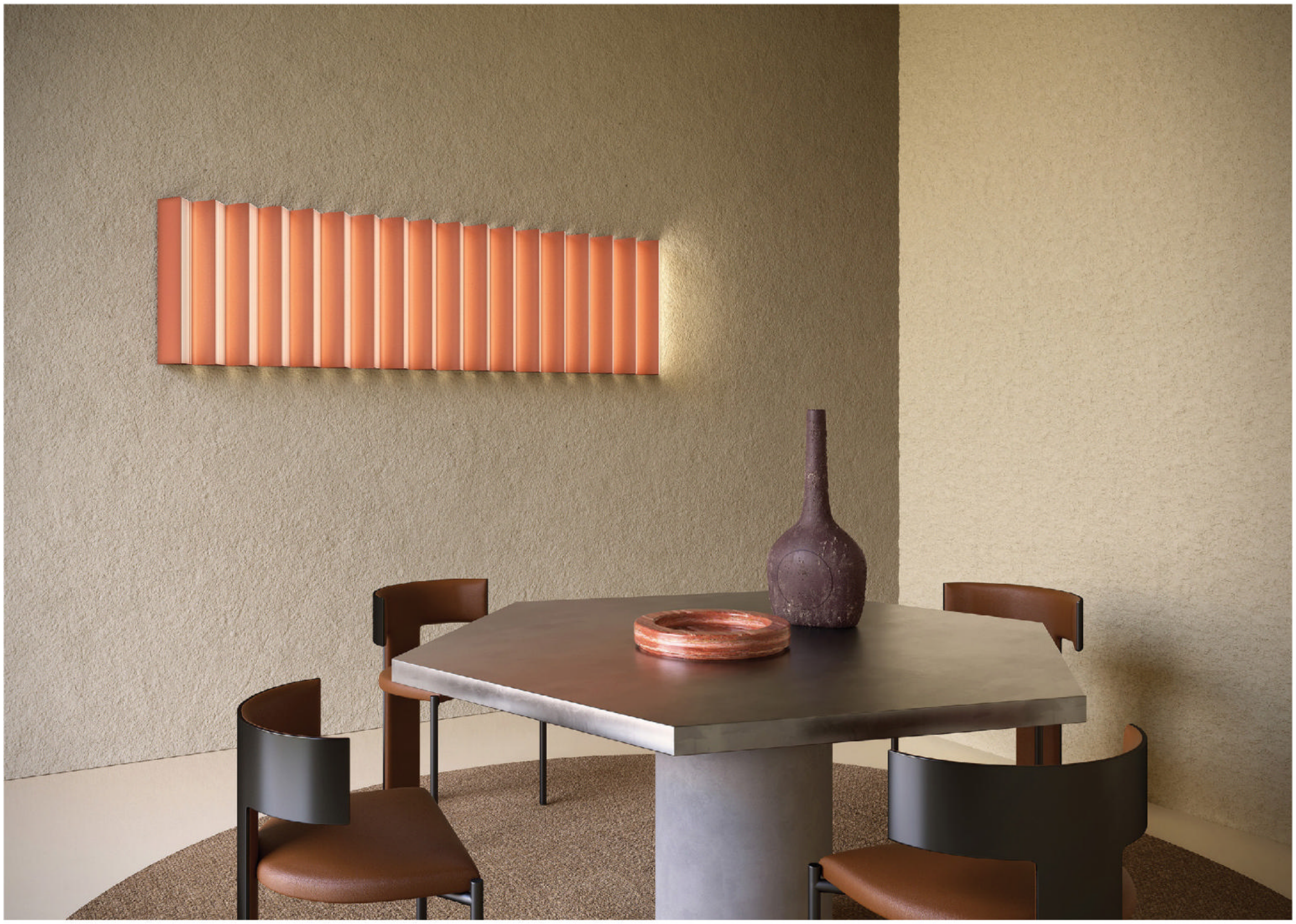
While Saadeh insists that his approach to crafts is forward thinking, he nonetheless values the historical roots of the trade. Fabraca's emphasis on design solutions, functionality and a contemporary aesthetic, he argues, challenges dominant ideas around artisanship. "We're not just producing limited edition collectibles," he says. "I want to show that craftsmanship can be used in a much broader way, but we need to keep it ongoing and relatable."

# Let there be light

From the minimal to the decorative – and the downright whimsical – *identity* sheds light on the latest designs to illuminate your home

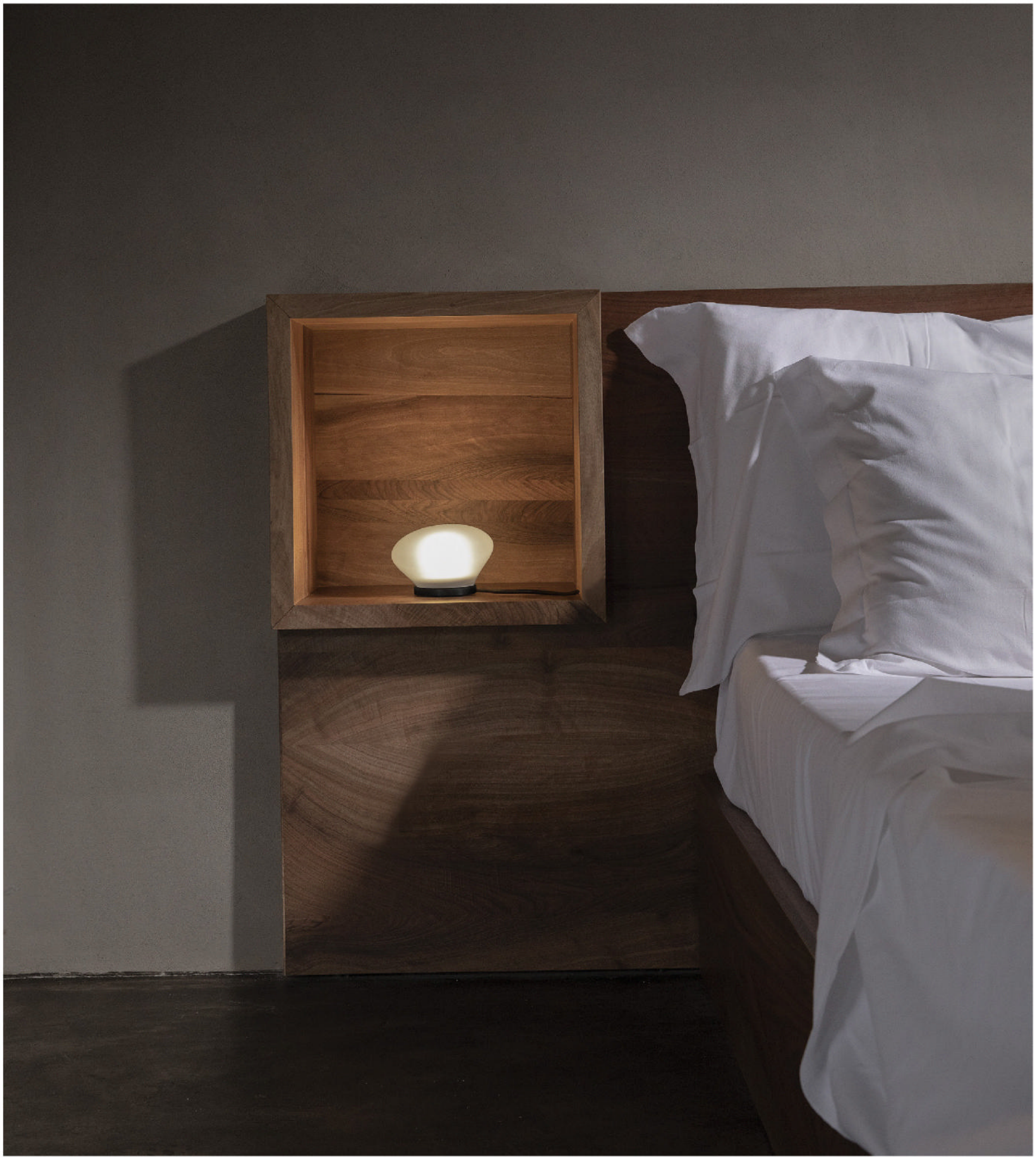


**Functional beauty**
Designed by Herzog & de Meuron for Artemide, the *Unterlinden* family has expanded into many versions, and the suspension, which was designed for the museum in Colmar, France, combines the aesthetic charm of a vintage object with contemporary technology and engineering. Its heat-dissipating body comes in either die-cast aluminium or bronze. The latest outdoor edition offers the characteristic aluminium head of the indoor collection with a 17 cm diameter (instead of the traditional 11 cm), ensuring superior light performance and making it better suited to outdoor settings. The collection is both functional and elegant, where simplicity and sophistication seamlessly align.



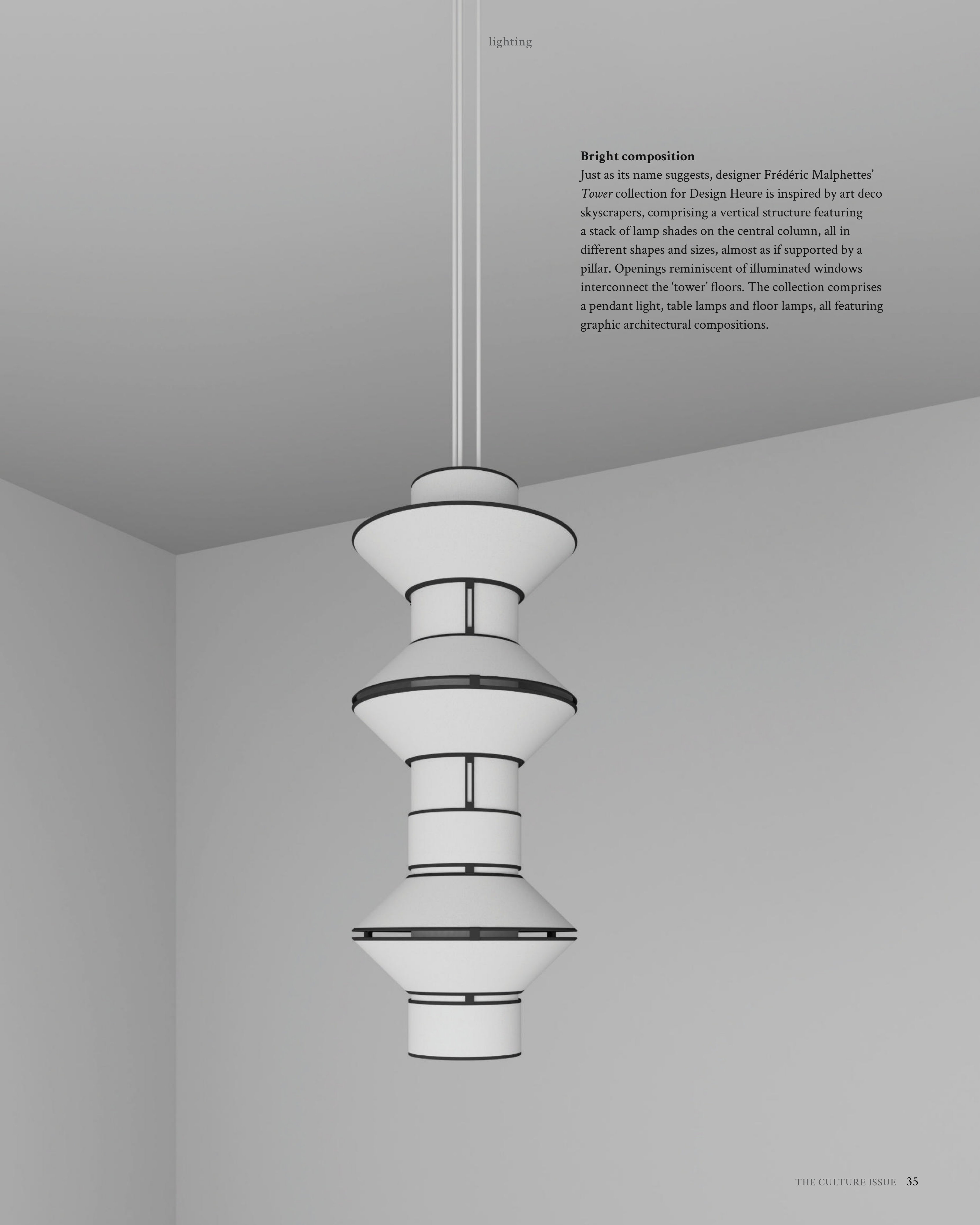
**Disco glamour**

Studiopepe's collaboration with Contardi has given birth to the *Stick* collection, inspired by the simplicity of elementary shapes. The lamp begins with a basic module featuring a triangular section, which becomes repeated to allow for infinite configurations while remaining expressive in structure. It comes in both wall-mounted and pendant versions, with each piece characterised by a minimal design that is both evocative and artistic. The modulated glass emanates from a diffuser with a ribbed glass effect that is contained within a metal structure featuring satin copper and golden nickel finishes.



**Heart of glass**

Inspired by a clear morning dewdrop that reflects the light of dawn, the *Agua* wall and table lamp for Karman by Matteo Ugolini and Edmondo Testaguzza is comprised of thick, curved hand-blown glass. It comes with either a transparent or frosted finish and is delicately designed to cast halos on walls and other reflective surfaces, creating intriguing shapes for both indoor and outdoor scenarios. The lamp itself floats with imperceptible lightness, just like a pleasant morning dream.

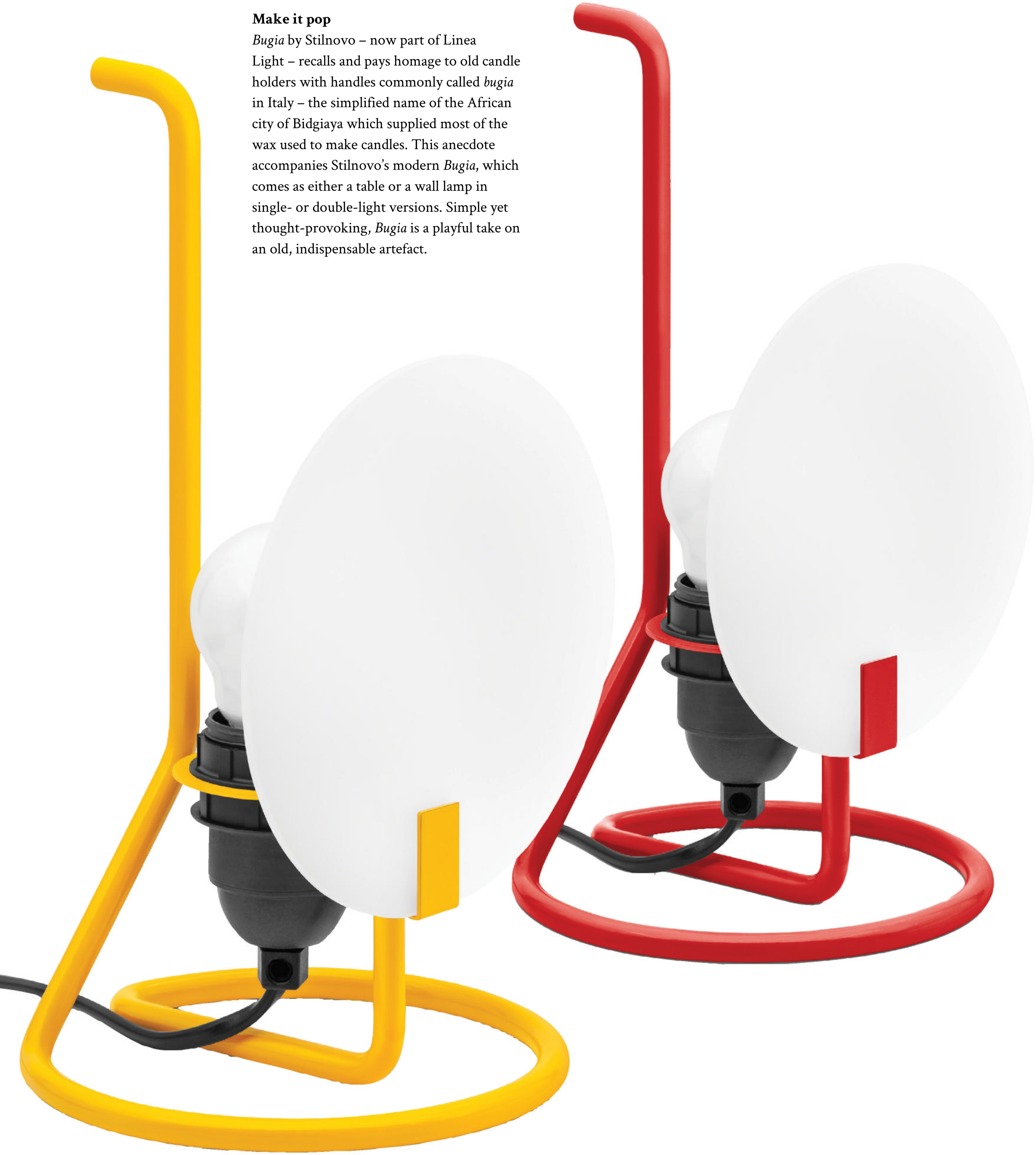


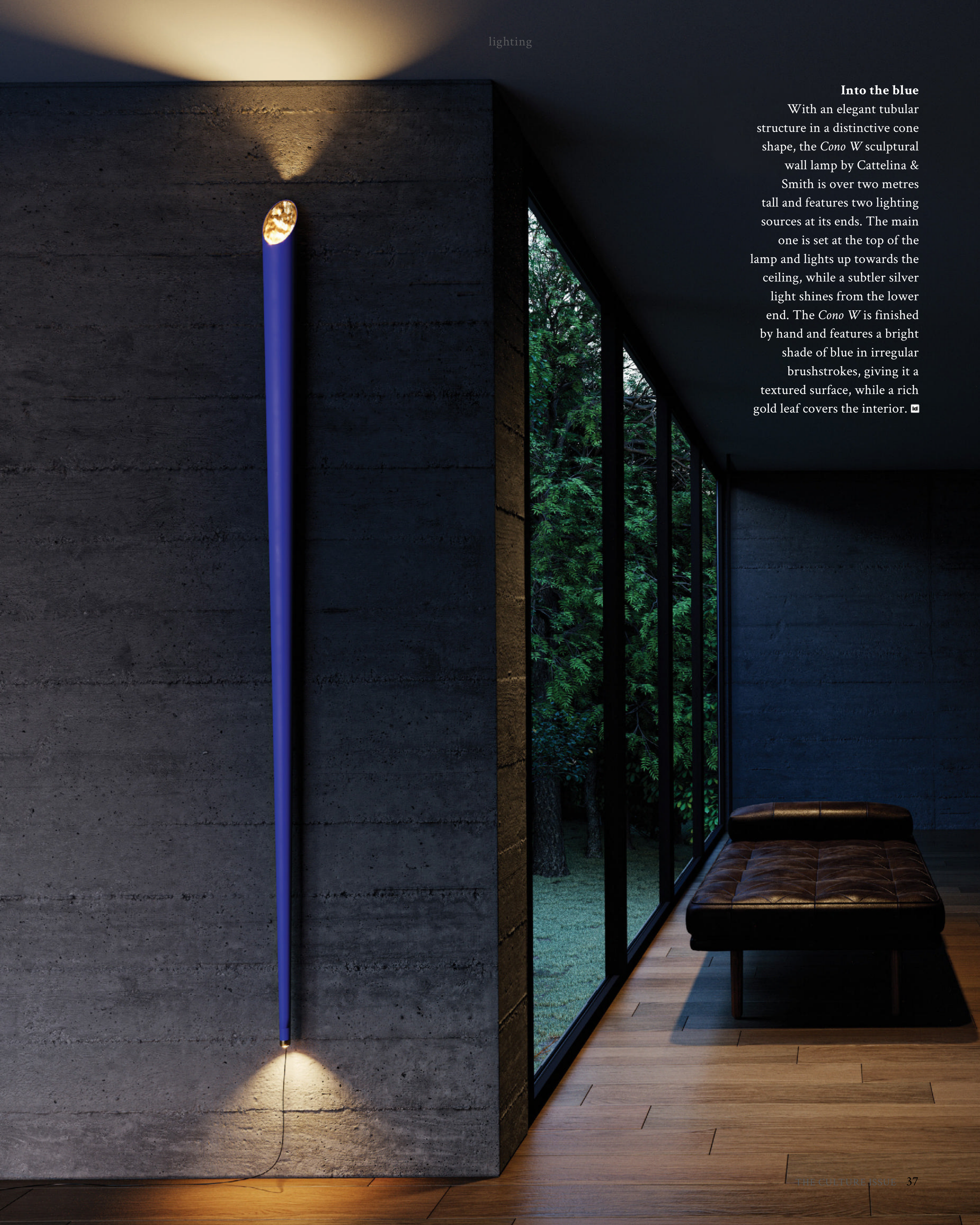
**Bright composition**

Just as its name suggests, designer Frédéric Malphettes' *Tower* collection for Design Heure is inspired by art deco skyscrapers, comprising a vertical structure featuring a stack of lamp shades on the central column, all in different shapes and sizes, almost as if supported by a pillar. Openings reminiscent of illuminated windows interconnect the 'tower' floors. The collection comprises a pendant light, table lamps and floor lamps, all featuring graphic architectural compositions.

**Make it pop**

*Bugia* by Stilnovo – now part of Linea Light – recalls and pays homage to old candle holders with handles commonly called *bugia* in Italy – the simplified name of the African city of Bidgiaya which supplied most of the wax used to make candles. This anecdote accompanies Stilnovo's modern *Bugia*, which comes as either a table or a wall lamp in single- or double-light versions. Simple yet thought-provoking, *Bugia* is a playful take on an old, indispensable artefact.





### Into the blue

With an elegant tubular structure in a distinctive cone shape, the *Cono W* sculptural wall lamp by Cattelina & Smith is over two metres tall and features two lighting sources at its ends. The main one is set at the top of the lamp and lights up towards the ceiling, while a subtler silver light shines from the lower end. The *Cono W* is finished by hand and features a bright shade of blue in irregular brushstrokes, giving it a textured surface, while a rich gold leaf covers the interior.

# Crafting a message

Nada Debs reflects on her 20-year career that has taken her on a journey of identity and acceptance, eventually resulting in a new language for Middle Eastern design

WORDS AND CREATIVE DIRECTION BY AIDAN IMANOVA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY OSCAR MUNAR
STYLING BY NATASCHA HAWKE FEATURING BOTTEGA VENETA SPRING 23 COLLECTION

When Nada Debs answers the Zoom call that we had arranged earlier that week, she is fresh from a swim at the pool. Although it is December in Beirut, a soft yet exuberant light streams in from a nearby window, engulfing the whole room – and Debs herself – in a warming glow. I ask her firstly about her Japanese upbringing and she answers that it is funny I ask because, only minutes ago, an incident at the pool had made her reflect on it. "I have been swimming from the age of six, so I am a fast swimmer," she begins. Another woman who was also swimming at the same pool struck up a conversation with Debs and later, recognising her as the designer, stated that she is unsurprised at Debs' swimming abilities, as success breeds more success. Debs quickly countered that. in fact, her abilities as a swimmer go back to her childhood in Japan where she was brought up with the importance of discipline. This lesson has trickled down to various other areas of her life, but mostly her way of working. "When you have discipline, you become organised; your design thinking becomes organised," she continues. "When I design a product, I have to justify everything. I can't just say, 'Oh it looks good'. I have to make sure that there is a reason for this element that I added. This comes from the Japanese way of thinking which has influenced the way I work."

She later went on to study interior architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design and moved to London where she was designing custom furniture for private clients. "At that time, I didn't know anything about Middle Eastern craft; I was still doing my own minimalist-style furniture," she remembers. "If you looked at my pieces, they all looked very Japanese – as if a Japanese person designed them." ▸▸

Nada Debs is wearing a high-neck sweater in double wool mohair with a chevron knit and a shiny leather skirt by Bottega Veneta Spring 23 collection. Behind her is the *Funquetry* shelving and *Marquetry Mania* book stopper

A window seat in the bedroom looks out across the bay in the primary bedroom. Obakki cushions sit on black oak millwork while a wool *Timo* rug by B&B Italia add warmth to the polished concrete floors

Debs in her living room in Dubai, wearing the LW wool sweater, curved leg indigo denim trousers and the *Madame* platform pumps in gloss croc. The living features the *Keeping it Together* console, *Dervish* carafes, the 3-legged *Pebble* table, *Zen* sofa, Oculus carpet, the *Tatami* table and *Mamebukuru* chair

Detailed view of the *Dervish* carafes, Gear coffee tables and Oculus rug

The hall features Debs' collaboration with Flower Society: the *Gear* vase and *Carapace* centre table

Debs applied philosophies such as structure and purity to her designs, evident even in her earlier pieces like the floating stool, the coffee bean table and the sake console whose legs were bent in intoxication.

Moving to Lebanon in 2000, Debs quickly discovered that the design scene which she was so accustomed to being a part of in her previous places of residence was non-existent here. Contemporary furniture in the city was mostly imported from Europe, and local furniture included either elaborate antique works or pieces in the Ottoman style.

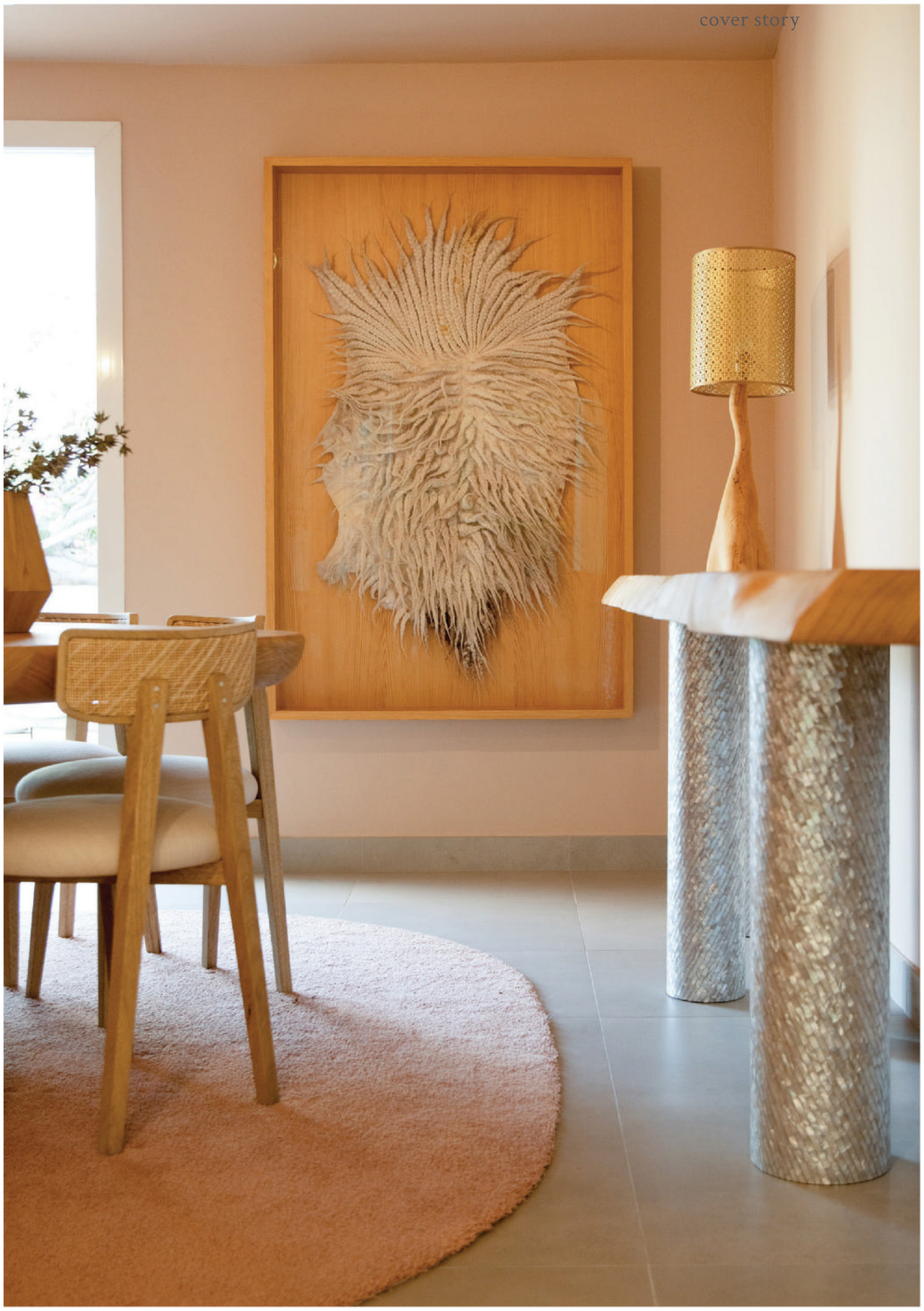
It was this gap in the market that encouraged Debs to seek out what contemporary furniture design in the Arab world could be, eventually taking her to Damascus where she found workshops – "they were all hidden" – where craftsmen worked on intricate mother of pearl inlay, which fascinated her. "But the result was these old overly elaborate and overly decorative piece and I said, 'No way am I going to buy something like that' and 'No way somebody like me is going to buy something like that'," she recounts.

Debs started seeing this issue everywhere: from people's homes to government buildings that failed to reflect a sense of contemporary Arab identity. "When you looked at interviews with presidents, the backgrounds were [full of] all these antique objects; there was nothing contemporary. So how would you think of them? You would think of them as backwards, that they don't think in a modern way." Today, Debs has completed many projects for regional government institutions. "The coffee tables that I designed for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Abu Dabi were were all pure stainless steel – but at the edge you have this very elaborate and intricate mother of pearl pattern. You recognise that it is modern, but it is also intrinsically Arab, and it is done by hand, by human souls," she says.

Looking back, Debs says: "I realised then that the Lebanese people and Arabs had no confidence in themselves… and this sense of shame is something that I needed to work on because I had that same sense of shame coming from Japan. I was ashamed to be Arab and to be Muslim and I thought, 'We are backwards, we are uncivilised, we are dirty' – I had inherited all the Western ways of looking at the Arab world. And I said, 'I don't want that to happen. I want to try to change that'."

"My work is not just about making furniture; I think it's a message," she continues. "It is a message to tell people, 'Be proud of who you are and adapt'. And if you're not proud, turn it into something you can be proud of. Do something about it." ▸▸

Debs is sitting on the *Marquetry Mania* table, featuring the Marquetry Mania bowl. Behind her is the *Arabesque* wall lamp and a photograph by Dia Mrad. She is wearing a full look from Bottega Veneta's Spring 23 collection



Above: The dining room features the *Organic* console, *Carapace* dining table and *Lulu* chairs, as well as vases from her collaboration with Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council. On the wall is a textile artpiece by Adrian Pepe. Opposite page: Debs poses in front of the *Patterns in Nature* bar cabinet, created in collaboration with Salim Azzam. She is wearing a shiny leather shirt and Intrecciato leather skirt and a belt with metal elements and nappa leather from Bottega Veneta

Debs officially started her brand in 2002, focusing on pillars of identity, materiality and craft. Over the years, she has worked on a number of regional crafts, contemporising them while also paying homage to their cultural and historical relevance and beauty. She has worked with mother of pearl inlay techniques, tin inlay, marquetry and brass hammering, to name a few – always incorporating these traditional techniques into modern materials such as concrete or resin.

Going through a myriad of evolutions in her design language – though always maintaining a sense of purity and minimalism – Debs eventually settled down with what has today become recognisable as the Nada Debs brand: geometric patterns. "Now everyone recognises that whenever there is a pattern with a craft then it's Nada Debs," she laughs. "But it was all an evolution, it was not overnight."

Debs' dream is to follow the silk route, just like her family had once done with textiles – from India, Iran, China, and eventually going back to where she started: Japan.

The designer has recently moved to Dubai where she is planning on expanding her business. "The way I started, I really didn't have a plan," she confesses. "So as much as it has been a personal journey, I think today it has really become a brand. But when you have a brand, you have to think about scaling up, think about the business. So, the question now is what do we need to do to scale up? And this is a big challenge for someone working in craft, because, especially in Lebanon, there is a lack of workers."

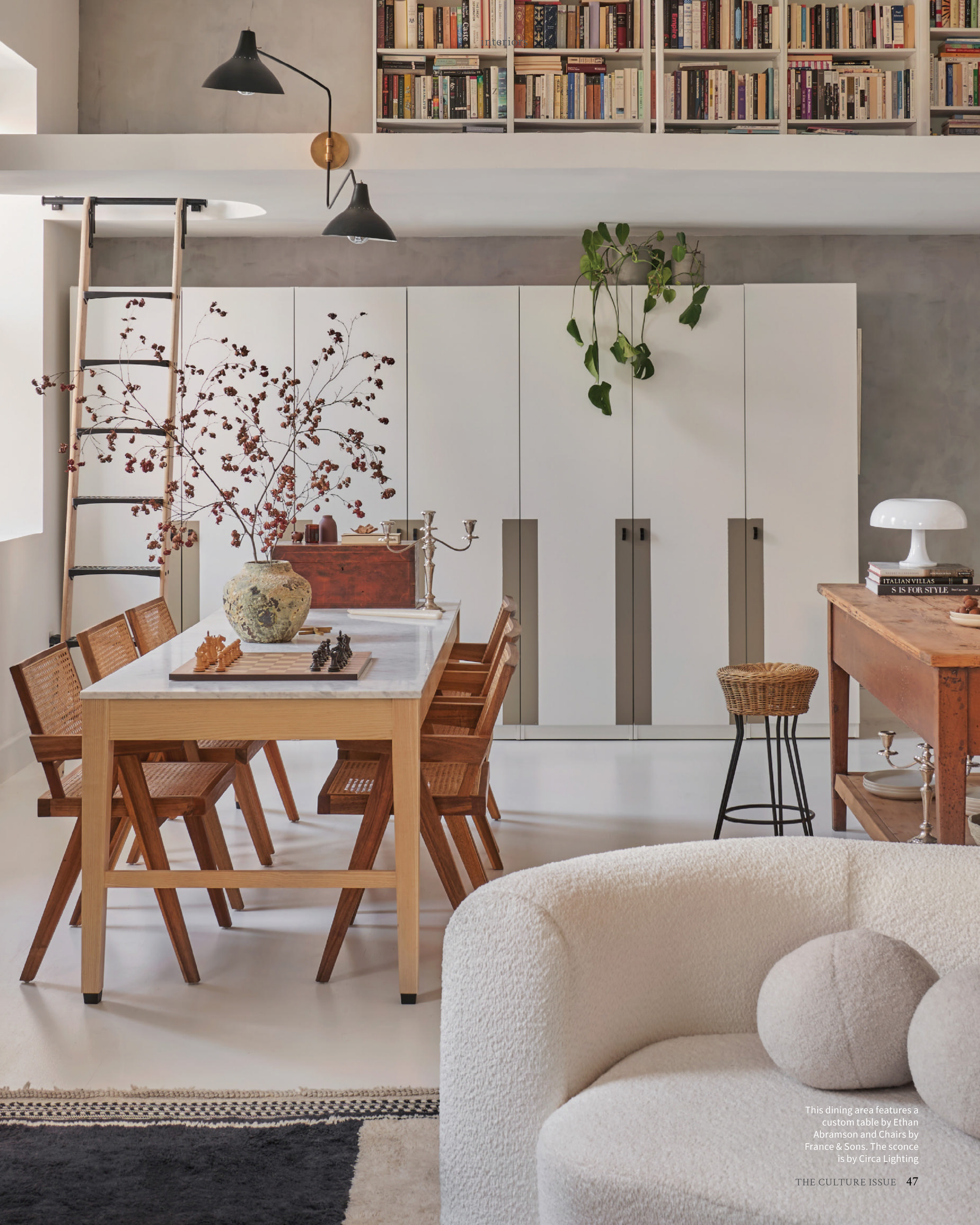
"The point now is to grow. Or maybe I should quit. But every time I think it's time for the next generation, everyone says no," she laughs. "I do also still feel like I could do more."

Her latest collection is a mother of pearl console where the legs look like they are moving, which she presented in Beirut last month. "It's playful but it's also about moving forward, especially being in Beirut where we don't know what the future holds, but the idea is to keep moving forward. These legs reflect that movement, and reflect that we're not stopping," she says. "And it's also for me. I am not stopping. Sometimes I want to stop, but I am not. Even the furniture is telling me: 'Don't stop'."

# Brooklyn calling

Designed by Crystal Sinclair for a globetrotter who has lived in Kabul, Paris, Berlin and London, this New York City home reflects the owner's past experiences

WORDS BY KARINE MONIÉ
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH CAPLAN
STYLING BY MARIANA MARCKI-MATOS


Caste
Empire
ITALIAN VILLAS
S IS FOR STYLE

This dining area features a custom table by Ethan Abramson and Chairs by France & Sons. The sconce is by Circa Lighting

Jessica Wright sitting on the Crate & Barrel sofa

The desk is custommade as is the 1stdibs daybed. The sconces are also from 1stdibs. The lamp is from Etsy lamp and the desk cahir from TRNK

Throughout this Brooklyn loft, interior designer Crystal Sinclair introduced a range of textures to create a warm atmosphere

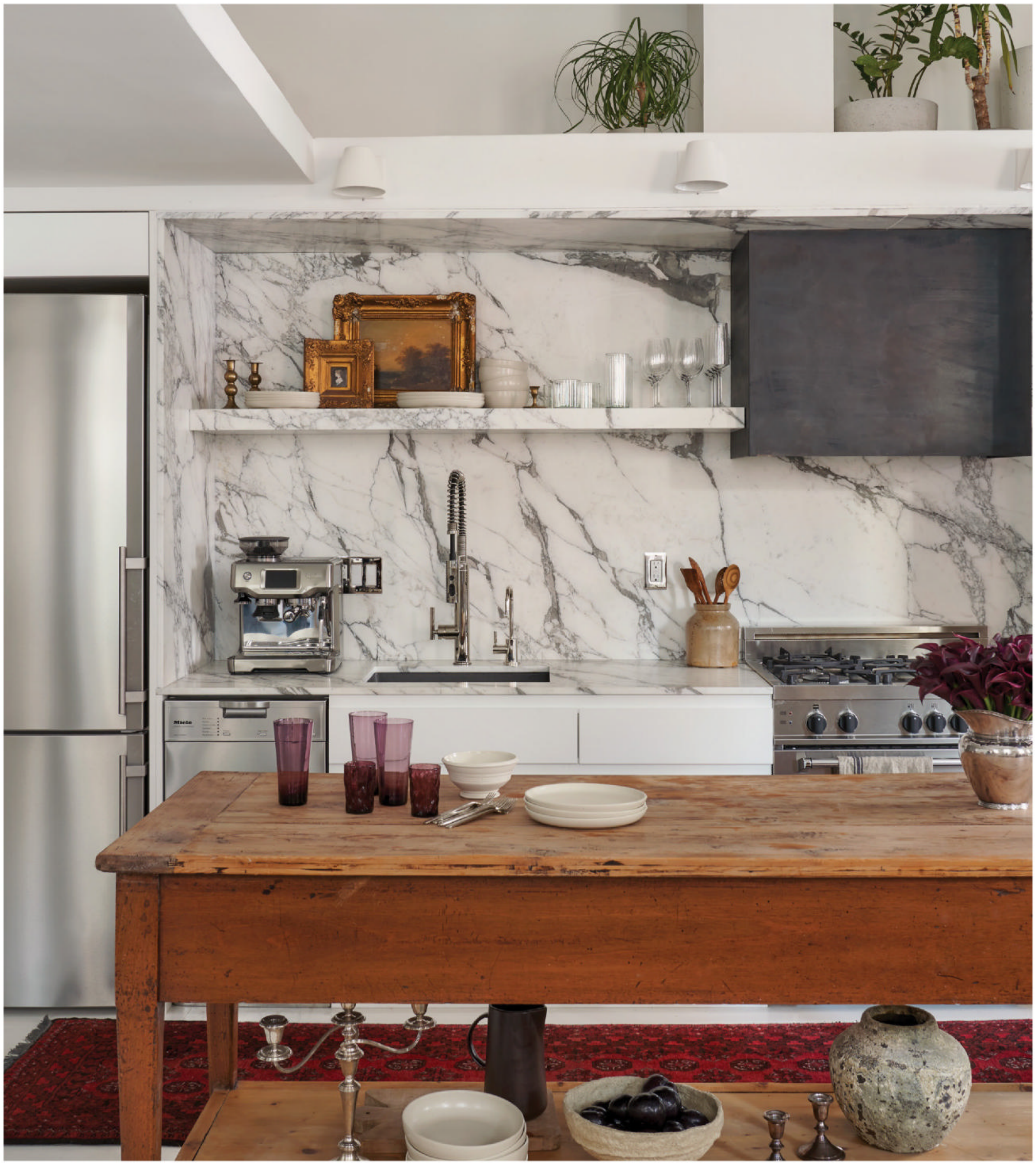
After travelling the world — for pleasure, study and work — over the course of several years, Jessica Wright wanted to return home to the United States. Even if the international context felt complicated due to COVID-19, the litigator and writer turned it into an opportunity. And instead of heading to the countryside, she decided to invest in New York City — specifically in Brooklyn — where she bought a 110-square metre apartment nestled in a former soap factory warehouse-turned-residential building. Ideal for her and her beloved dog Winston, the loft features a large open space and comprises a mezzanine with an important collection of books.

To achieve the current result, which combines functionality and beauty, the owner knew she needed the help of an expert, and already had a name in mind: Crystal Sinclair, an interior designer she discovered online while browsing the webpages of design magazines. Seeing a small project, where the New York-based creative mind had blended references from both sides of the Atlantic, immediately convinced Wright to call upon Sinclair's expertise.

An important requirement for the owner was to reflect the several places in which she had previously lived. Among them are London, where she was an international relations theory and political economy student at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE); and Kabul, where she collaborated with NATO, the U.S. Department of State and the Administrative Office of the President of Afghanistan on rule of law initiatives.

Having an office at home was essential for Wright, who works there several days a week. As there was no option for a separate room, Sinclair installed a desk spanning an entire wall, making the most of every square metre.

Thanks to the bright walls and the four-metre-high concrete coffered ceiling, the loft feels airy. To mark the separation between the bedroom and the main living space without blocking natural light, Sinclair smartly opted for a glass wall. In every nook, the old character of the building blends with the audacious and contemporary vision of the interior designer, who strove to create the atmosphere of an artist's loft with Parisian flair. ▸▸

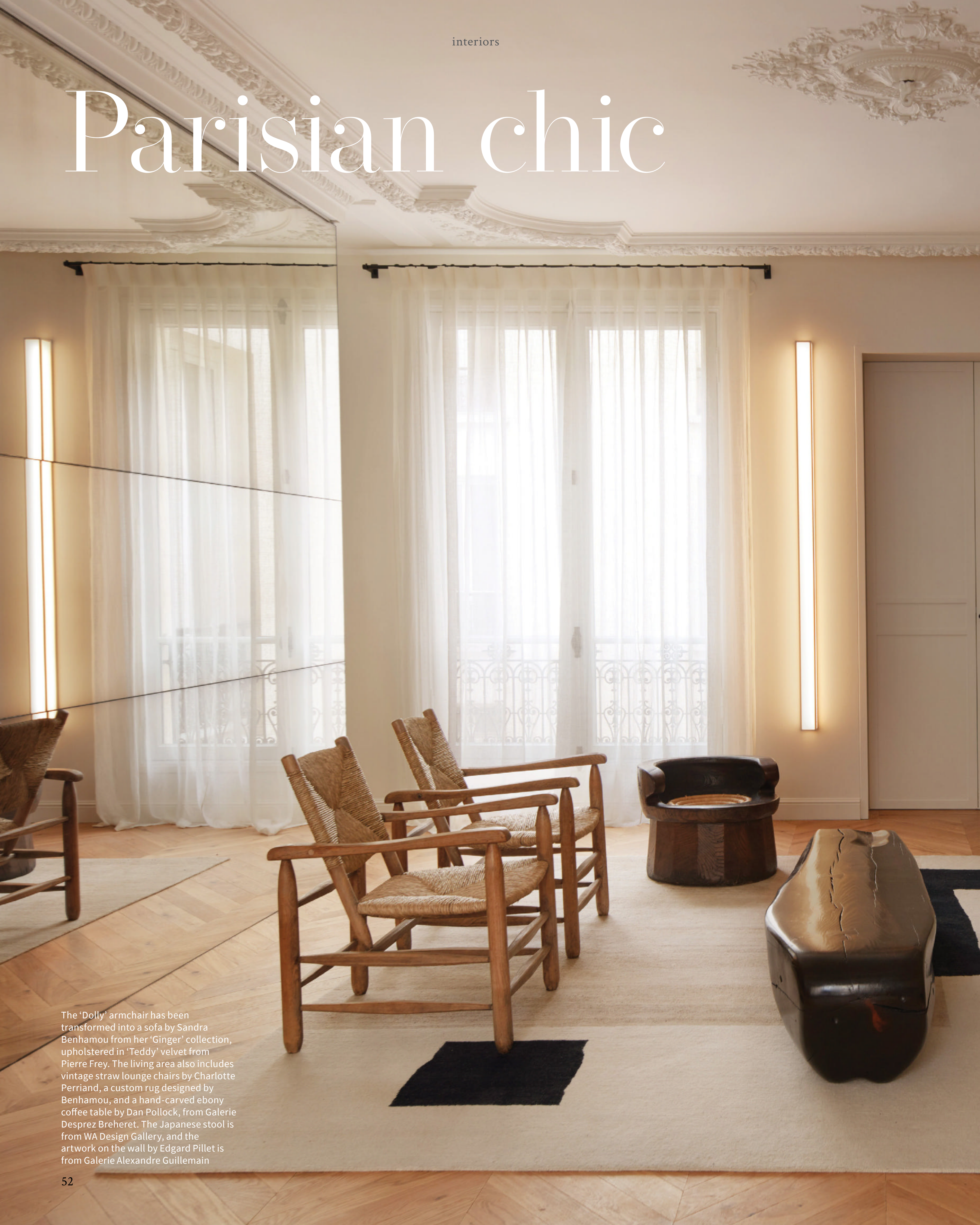


Several decorative elements add texture throughout the space, from the cosy and curvy bouclé sofa that sits on the corner of the Moroccan rug, to the large chandelier made of crystals that hangs over it. Layering in to introduce more depth in the home was Sinclair's main idea. With some antiques – such as the easel that acts as the TV support, and the wingback chair – paired with contemporary elements such as the coffee table, the combination of different styles gives life to a unique and very personal decor. Dear to Wright, and both from Afghanistan, the Nuristani mirror and the tribal Qashqai rug are a daily reminder of her enriching experience in the country.

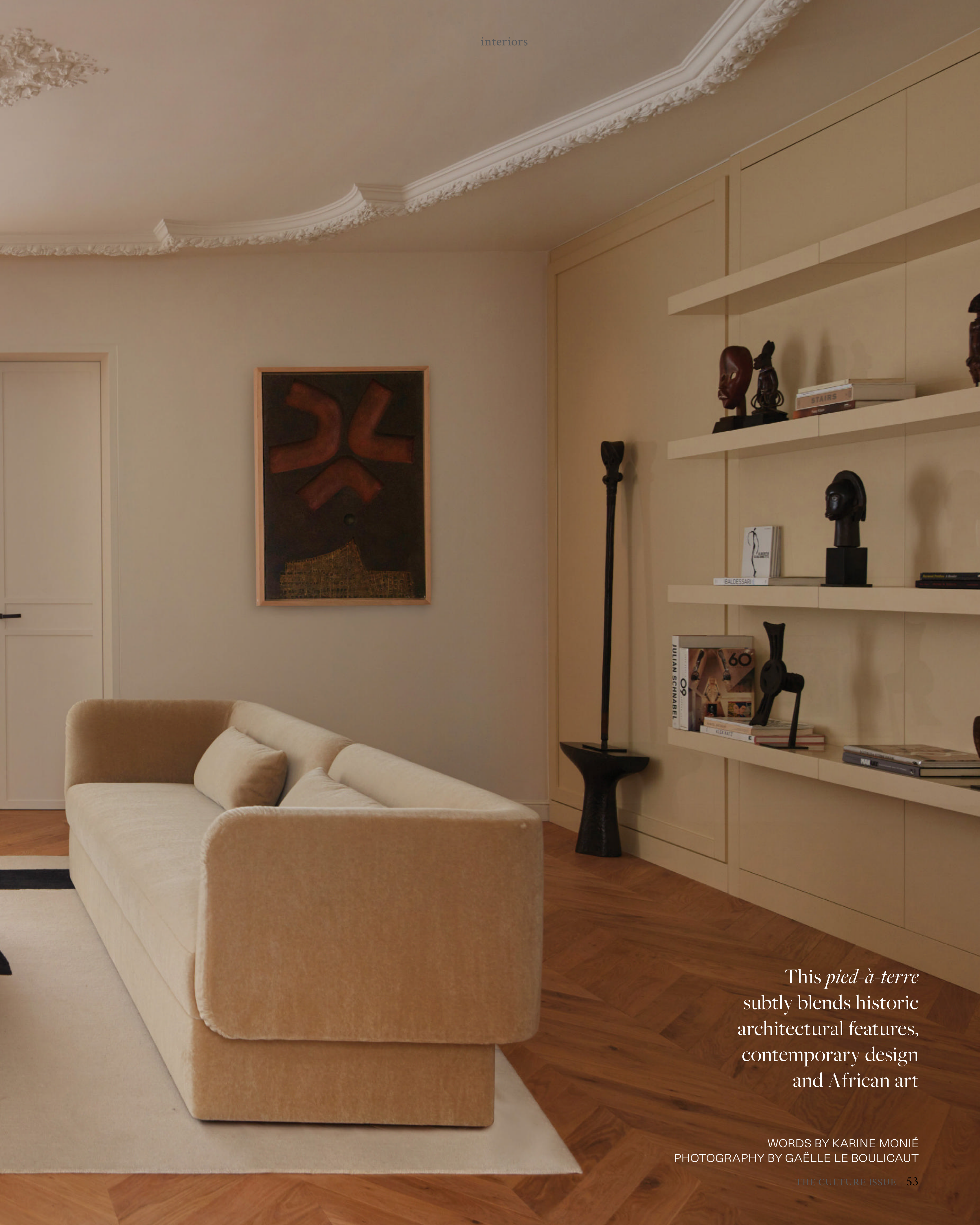
With her limitless and bold creativity combined with a love for mixing and matching styles, Sinclair managed to visually translate Wright's idea of marrying opposites with cohesion, going even further than the owner had imagined. In this home, modernity goes along with a sense of romanticism and nostalgia; objects from different cultures complement each other; and glamour rhymes with casual. The results could not be more perfect.

This page: Chairish island. Etsy antique paintings. Next page: Crate & Barrel sofa. Crystal Sinclair Designs rug. 1stdibs *Bolo* chair. Vintage easel found on Etsy. 1stdibs wingback chair. 1stdibs chandelier. RH coffee table. Shade Store drapes

# Parisian chic

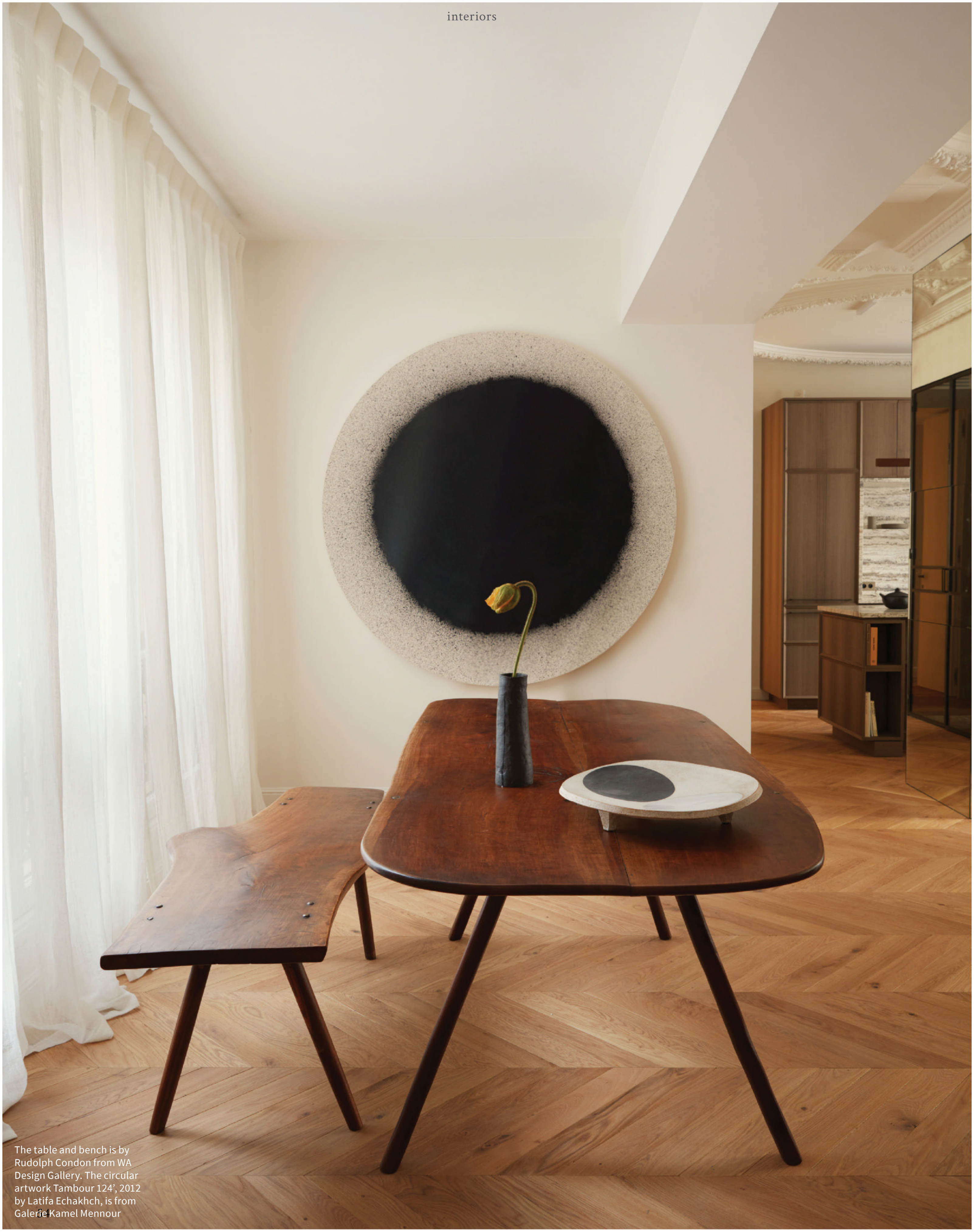


The 'Dolly' armchair has been transformed into a sofa by Sandra Benhamou from her 'Ginger' collection, upholstered in 'Teddy' velvet from Pierre Frey. The living area also includes vintage straw lounge chairs by Charlotte Perriand, a custom rug designed by Benhamou, and a hand-carved ebony coffee table by Dan Pollock, from Galerie Desprez Breheret. The Japanese stool is from WA Design Gallery, and the artwork on the wall by Edgard Pillet is from Galerie Alexandre Guillemain


STAIRS
BALDESSARI
JULIAN SCHNABEL
60

This *pied-à-terre* subtly blends historic architectural features, contemporary design and African art

WORDS BY KARINE MONIÉ
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GAËLLE LE BOULICAUT



The table and bench is by Rudolph Condon from WA Design Gallery. The circular artwork Tambour 124’, 2012 by Latifa Echakhch, is from Galerie Kamel Mennour

It is hard to imagine that this home was previously a corporate space. Thanks to the talent of Parisian interior architect Sandra Benhamou – who has Italian and Tunisian origins – it has become an unrecognisable two-bedroom apartment, used as the French *pied-à-terre* of art-lovers.

Ideally located in the 7th arrondissement on the Rive Gauche (Left Bank), near the charming Rodin Museum, the space is nestled in a typical Haussmann building. Inside, however, Benhamou had to start from scratch to get it back to its former glory. She started by demolishing internal walls and ripping out the false ceiling, a process that revealed beautiful cornices and mouldings that the interior architect immediately decided to restore to their original state.

On the floors, the herringbone parquet brings the warmth and Parisian flair that the homeowners were after. For them, having a timeless and peaceful home was key – and Benhamou made sure to respond to this brief by focusing on a soft palette dictated by the materials themselves. Of high quality but not too luxurious, the travertine and different types of woods – including oak, chestnut, walnut and ebony – adorn the rooms with some variation in tone, from beige to camel to chocolate. The use of lacquer, too, reinforces nods to the '70s through the apartment's decoration, which reflects a contrast – yet also a balance – between Haussmann and contemporary features.

In the centre of the home, Benhamou adorned the chimney duct with tinted mirrors for a touch of glamour and a feeling of depth. This element separates two areas. On one side, the living room is furnished with the Sandra Benhamou Dolly armchair-turned-sofa from her *Ginger* collection, upholstered in *Teddy* velvet from Pierre Frey. In front of it, two vintage straw lounge chairs by Charlotte Perriand and a hand-carved coffee table by Dan Pollock from Galerie Desprez Bréhéret are placed on the custom-designed rug by Benhamou. Every corner is dressed with fascinating objects, such as the Japanese stool from WA Design Gallery, an artwork by Edgard Pillet from Galerie Alexandre Guillemain and a piece of tribal art from Galerie Lucas Ratton that stands on the *Stool #13* by Guillaume Bardet from Galerie kreo. On the other side, the kitchen with walnut timber cabinetry is illuminated by the *I-Model* pendant designed by Anour and personalised with an artwork by Douglas Gordon on the wall, while the ornate circular ceiling rose evokes the past. ▸▸

The Gio side table is part of Sandr Benhamou's Ginger collection and the Otherways plaid is by Jules & Jim

The artwork above the bathtub is Triptik in the Wood by Sacha Haillotte, 2017. The other paintings are by Edgard Pillet, from Galerie Alexandre Guillemain

Left: Sandra Benhamou stands beside a piece of tribal art purchased from Galerie Lucas Ratton in Paris, standing on 'Stool #13' by Guillaume Bardet from Galeire Kreo

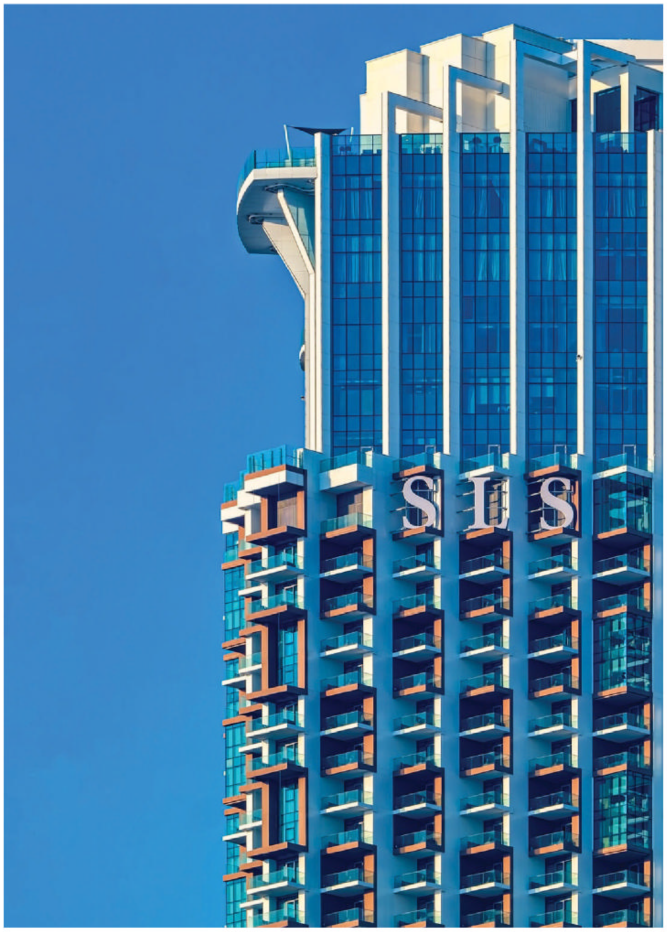
Having started her career in film before launching her design studio in 2020, Benhamou is an expert in creating visual narratives. This space – as with all those she shapes – is an ode to storytelling.

The discovery continues in the dining room, where a table and bench by Rudolph Condon dialogue with the circular artwork 'Tambour 124" by Latifa Echakhch from Galerie Kamel Mennour and a floor lamp from Galerie Desprez Bréhéret. Soft yet cosy, the atmosphere conveys a true sense of harmony. In the main bedroom, the custom lacquered buttercream headboard complements the taupe grey wardrobe cabinetry, while the Pierre Cardin mirror from Galerie Alexandre Guillemain and an artwork by Tadashi Kawamata are a perfect fit for the space.

Mixing the sophisticated and the raw, this home pays tribute to the free-spirited approach of self-taught designer Benhamou, who is not afraid of breaking the rules to achieve curated interiors with the perfect dose of tension infused with a touch of femininity. Yes, we'll always have Paris, but only a few understand it properly and succeed in honouring its finesse. ■

# Envisioning the future

International architecture and design practice Aedas
celebrates 16 years of creativity in the Middle East



Architecture, interiors, landscape, urban design and master planning are all areas covered by global practice Aedas, with projects around the world that are nurtured by the same philosophy: global presence driven by local knowledge. In the firm's Dubai office, led by Global Design Principal Ignacio Gomez, the team includes over 20 different nationalities – a key asset that ensures every project is based on a deep understanding of social and cultural needs. The firm's wealth of experience and passion for design allows it to be at the forefront of today's creative industries, pushing boundaries and innovating.

Many of the firm's projects in Dubai have contributed to the city's growing skyline. One major project is the Dubai Metro, which was completed in 2008, covering 74 kilometres and 45 stations. The project was inspired by the history and traditions of old Dubai and its heritage as a pearling village, taking cues from the rough outer surface of shells and their smooth interiors.

Aedas is also behind an impressive 85-storey skyscraper, DAMAC Residence, whose curvature offers exceptional views of the Palm Jumeirah. "The playfulness of this tower was concentrated in the two most visible faces, allowing units to bend up the [building] in two blades," says the Aedas team. Additionally, the firm also completed the futuristic ENOC Station in Dubai, known as the world's first LEED Platinum petrol station, which incorporates innovative design principles and sustainable practices.

The year 2021 marked the completion of several significant projects in the city. One of them is the SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences, which provides four primary views on four sides – including the Burj Khalifa area – thanks to its 74-storey structure. The W Dubai – Mina Seyahi 5-star hotel was also completed that year. The beachfront resort refines the notion of place-making within a tourist area, through both the lens of its heritage and the lens of its futuristic perspective.

Another case in point is the Habitas AlUla resort in Saudi Arabia. Master planned by Aedas and designed by Habitas, the hotel, which is located in the Hidden Canyon, makes the most of the mesmerising landscape and features a prefabricated modular concept.

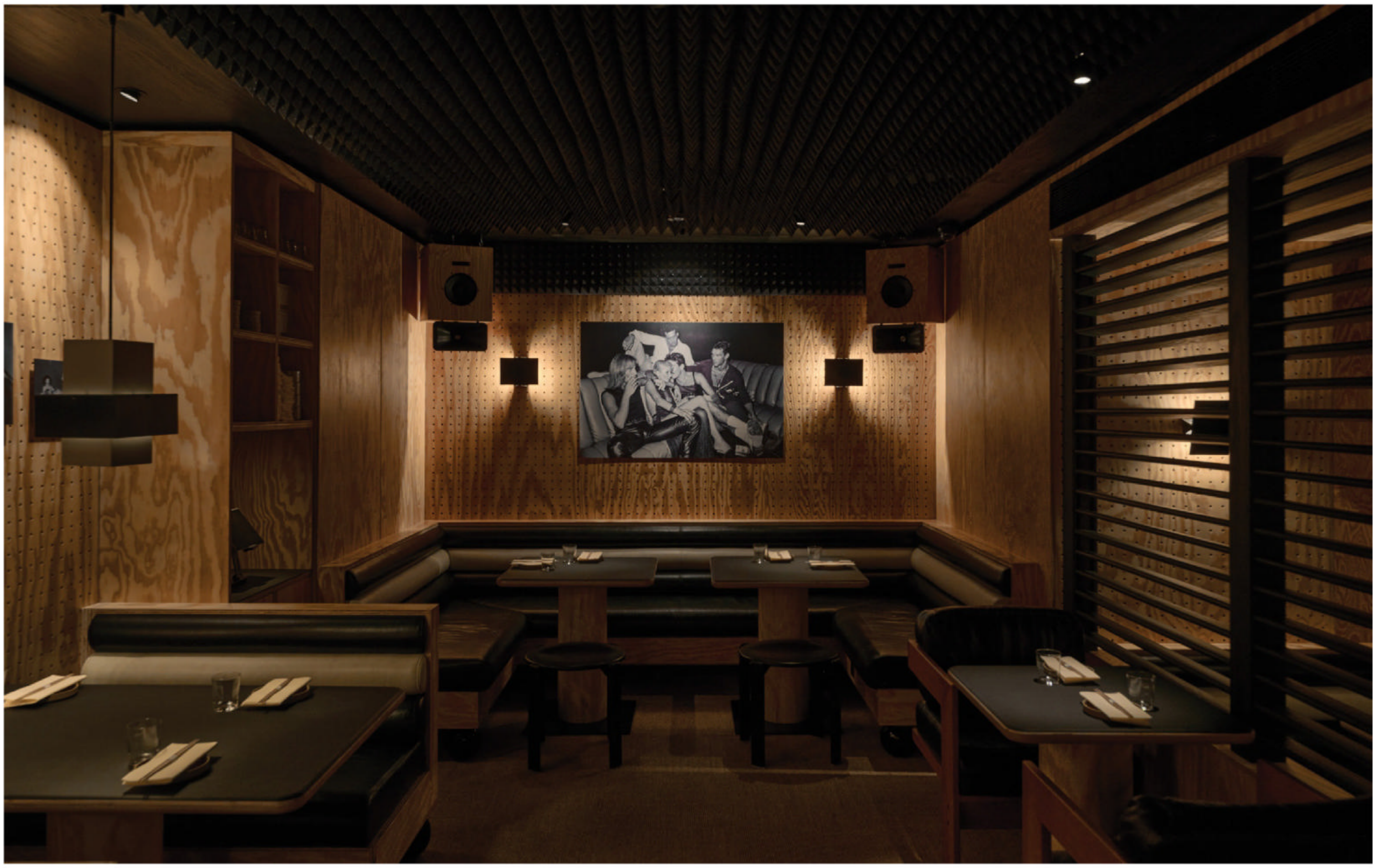
The firm's proposal for the Trojena Ski Village draws inspiration from sci-fi movies and is an invitation to enjoy an array of activities, including exhilarating land- and air-based sports through both the summer and winter seasons in Saudi Arabia. The terrain has influenced all aspects of its design, which cannot be duplicated anywhere else in the world.

"Our designs not only take inspiration but also learn from nature, science, biology, biomimicry, and so on," says the team. The results can be seen in innovative and long-lasting projects that create a vision for tomorrow's possibilities.

# High fidelity

The Middle East's first listening bar is designed as a Japanese *izakaya* – complete with wooden panels, Takumi-style carpets and retro furniture

WORDS BY AIDAN IMANOVA



A treat for both the city's audiophile community and its design lovers, the newly opened Honeycomb HI-FI listening bar and restaurant in Dubai brings together a space of creative expedition. Launched by the team behind other successful venues such as Miss Lily's and Indochine, Honeycomb HI-FI is VKD Hospitality's latest tribute to the city.

The plurality of the space makes it difficult to pigeonhole as a single offering, and its influences and collaborations are just as wide-ranging. The bar gives back to the cultural scene of the city, with visitors being met by a record store created in collaboration with Flipside Records upon entry, leading to a set of *noren* curtains that finally reveals the darkened and intimately lit bar and dining space.

"The choice of materials is the foundation of the design concept," says Serge Becker, creative director and partner at VKD Hospitality, who worked with New York-based Volenec Studio on the interiors. "The whole interior space is built from construction-grade plywood. It is a humble material that I first worked with three decades ago, and since then, a whole world of architecture and design has developed around this basic building block. We also combined references from traditional Japanese houses as well as recording studio interiors [and turned it] into this honey-coloured environment."

"Honeycomb is part of a tradition of *izakayas*, which are Japan's gastro pubs, vinyl listening lounges and jazz *kissa* coffee shops. These traditions have spread around the world, and we had put our own spin on it in true Kaizen fashion," he continues.

The perforated wooden wall panels that resemble a honeycomb become the base of the contemporary space, balanced with nostalgic touches such as the retro Bruno Rey barstools and chairs inspired by the works of Tobia Scarpa. Japanese influences are also present throughout, such as in the Takumi-style carpets and the clean lines of the overall space, which is covered in acoustic foam, reaffirming its audio-centric experience.

The 'Listening Bar' is at the forefront of the space and is true to its name, while 'The Gallery' is a smaller elevated space off the main room with an added sense of intimacy, hidden behind subtle shutters. It also showcases a rotating art exhibition, featuring global music cultures throughout time, with a current collaboration with photographer Bill Bernstein featuring images from New York's nightlife scene in the 1970s.

Another important collaboration is that with legendary designer Devon Turnbull, who builds speakers, amps and turntables by hand, creating distinct hi-fi sound systems. His work at Honeycomb is no different, with his minimally designed Ojas speakers integrating into the overall interiors of the space.

The recently opened outdoor terrace, dubbed 'The Garden', is a tribute to Japanese bamboo gardens, with an industrial edge. A deep green bamboo cage surrounds the area, and the artificial turf floor references the country's moss gardens. The rest of the materials are kept humble but not without creative flair. "The particle board banquettes with exposed packing foam cushions utilise materials that are usually covered with higher-end finishes, while the Vico Magistretti plastic chairs are a precursor to the ubiquitous monobloc chairs that are the most widely used seating staple all over the world," Becker says. A floating plywood bar stands elevated at the end of the terrace, where guests can enjoy the open air and waterside views of the canal through the dramatic bamboo cage grid.

Zimmerwald
White

# Culinary art

This minimal eatery in Kuwait plays with transparency and an eclectic furniture selection

WORDS BY AIDAN IMANOVA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MOHAMMAD TAQI ASHKANANI

One studio that has been consistently delivering a refined approach to hospitality and retail spaces is Kuwait-based fortytwelve. The studio is led by architect Khaled Alawadhi, who has in a short time developed a signature interior formula that is led by thought-provoking design solutions, sophisticated craftsmanship and exciting furnishing selections.

The Gulf city has recently become home to some of the most innovative and design-savvy food-and-beverage venues in the region, and fortytwelve's expertise in the field has greatly contributed to this rise with projects such as Earth and The Bowl.

The boutique studio's latest endeavour is the pared-back yet detail-rich Ode Eatery in Kuwait City, featuring an expressive use of materials and textures.

The studio worked closely with the client – who is also the chef running the kitchen – to create a highly functional space, focusing primarily on the kitchen itself and the display counter, which was achieved through a translucent fluted glass enclosure and a play on materials and volumes on the food display counter. Large windows allow ample light into the interior space, creating a playful interaction between the diners and the activity in the kitchen through movement and colour.

"We relied heavily on fluted glass, micro cement, a graphic wood veneer and beige stone to create all the main elements of the shop, while adding colour through the different furniture elements," Alawadhi says. ▸▸

The carefully selected pieces of furniture are an eclectic mix of timeless pieces that enable a variety of seating arrangements, featuring the likes of Frama, Cassina, Dirk van der Kooij, Hem and DesignByThem.

For the lighting, fortytwelve worked closely with Beirut-based Fabraca Studios to create custom light fixtures throughout the space, using the same fluted glass that was used in the kitchen enclosure.

Artistic touches and graphic elements are peppered across the space, such as with the graphic wood veneer by Alpi that creates a sense of movement in the space. "At first, we considered marble but thought it would be too cold and rigid. Instead, the wood veneer provides the fluidity and movement found in marble while still being warm and comfortable, especially in seating," Alawadhi explains.

Other elements like grey cement floors, textured beige walls and stainless steel solidify the space.

Spreading across the space is a rail where various forms of artworks can be hung. "The rail was designed to create a dynamic feature in the constantly changing space. The rail showcases everything – from posters and postcards by artists the chef likes, to the daily menu and sometimes vinyl record covers," Alawadhi says.

# Desert debut

LA-fashion brand AMIRI opens its first flagship store in the Middle East with a special hand-painted capsule collection honouring the city of Dubai

From one-off denim creations that riffed on the countercultural milieu of his youth in '90s Los Angeles, Mike Amiri, CEO and creative director of AMIRI, has since built a global luxury fashion house that celebrates a bold artistic vision and refined craftsmanship. Joining its stores across the US, Tokyo and Shanghai, the brand's new flagship location in Dubai marks its Middle East debut and its third international outpost, where the brand can showcase its ties to the worlds of art and design – integral components of its DNA.

Spanning 325 square metres, the interiors are a display of Amiri's long-standing partnership with Paris-based studio NOCOD, who have translated the brand's design code into a dynamic balance of textures and materials to form a contemporary gallery-like environment, contrasted with soft lounge spaces. Dominant materials across the space include wood, paloma stone, marble and stainless steel, all adding to the textural richness of the design. The eclectic space is decorated with flora from California and furniture selected by Amiri himself, in collaboration with interior design Katherine Waronker. Flora from the city itself has also been pulled as part of the inspiration for the exclusive 'Dubai Palm Tree' collection, consisting of items in silk that have been hand-painted with botanical illustrations, as an homage to the date palm found in abundance across the city. Other works of art being exhibited within the space itself including a site-specific artwork by Detroit-based artist Jason Revok, composed of synthetic polymer and acrylic spray paint on a shaped canvas.

# Fashion killa

The new *Cullinan – Inspired by Fashion* takes inspiration from the world of high fashion

Taking inspiration from hues and textures seen in the world of high fashion, the House of Rolls Royce has revealed *Cullinan – Inspired by Fashion*, comprising two striking prêt-à-porter collections: *Re-Belle* and *Fu-Shion*, which were unveiled last year at Art Basel in Miami.

"With *Cullinan – Inspired by Fashion* we drew inspiration from the world of our patrons – individuals with eclectic tastes who define trends and influence current movements in the fields of art, fashion and design," says Celina Mettang, Bespoke Colour and Material Designer, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars. "They defy boundaries, challenge conventions and are bold in their expression of individuality. Reflective of their tastes, our *Cullinan – Inspired by Fashion* models are designed as statement pieces, perfectly tailored to suit the lifestyles of our clients."

Reflecting the ample bespoke possibilities for *Cullinan – Inspired by Fashion*, the designers created eight distinct personalities, with each collection featuring two interior colourways defined by iconic accent colours. They can also be paired with one or two selected exterior looks, from eye-catching to more understated.

Each model is a statement piece in its own right. *Re-Belle* reflects the contemporary colour blocking trends with vivid hues and a playful combination of textures, while the *Peony Pink* or *Lime Green* interior accents contrast with the *Arctic White* or *Cashmere Grey* leather trim. The fascia is finished with a detailed handwoven stainless-steel fabric, evocative of metallic apparel, while the delicate thread with a diameter as fine as 0.45 mm creates an intricate texture, catching the light when the vehicle is in motion.

*Fu-Shion*, on the other hand, reinterprets high fashion with a utilitarian edge and is embellished with functional elements evocative of street wear, while showcasing Cullinan's effortlessly luxurious personality.

An all-new Starlight Tailgate was designed for this edition of the Cullinan, extending the celestial ambiance of the Starlight Headliner beyond the interior of the motor car. Taking more than 22 hours to manufacture, it includes 192 softly illuminated stars that are incorporated into the perforated leather – and is complemented by a Viewing Suite upon which to enjoy a starry night.

The final innovation is found on the lower part of the fascia, which introduces a coloured piano veneer for the first time: *Cashmere Grey* for *Re-Belle* and *Navy Blue* for *Fu-Shion*. The glossy finish acts as a unifying element, bringing even more depth to the interior.

# Living history

This hidden sanctuary in the French Riviera is a preserved gem of history and architecture

WORDS BY AIDAN IMANOVA

From the superyachts dotting the Cannes harbour to the tiny island of Île Sainte-Marguerite is only a 10-minute boat ride where one arrives at much quieter crystalline waters with rocky inlets, its periphery surrounded by dense woods and wild beaches. The car-free isle is one of the four Lérins Islands – and while small, its vast historical and mythical repertoire balances the scales. The legend of the Man in the Iron Mask is believed to originate here – the prisoner, who was the supposed half-brother of King Louis XIV, was said to have been held captive in the island's tower.

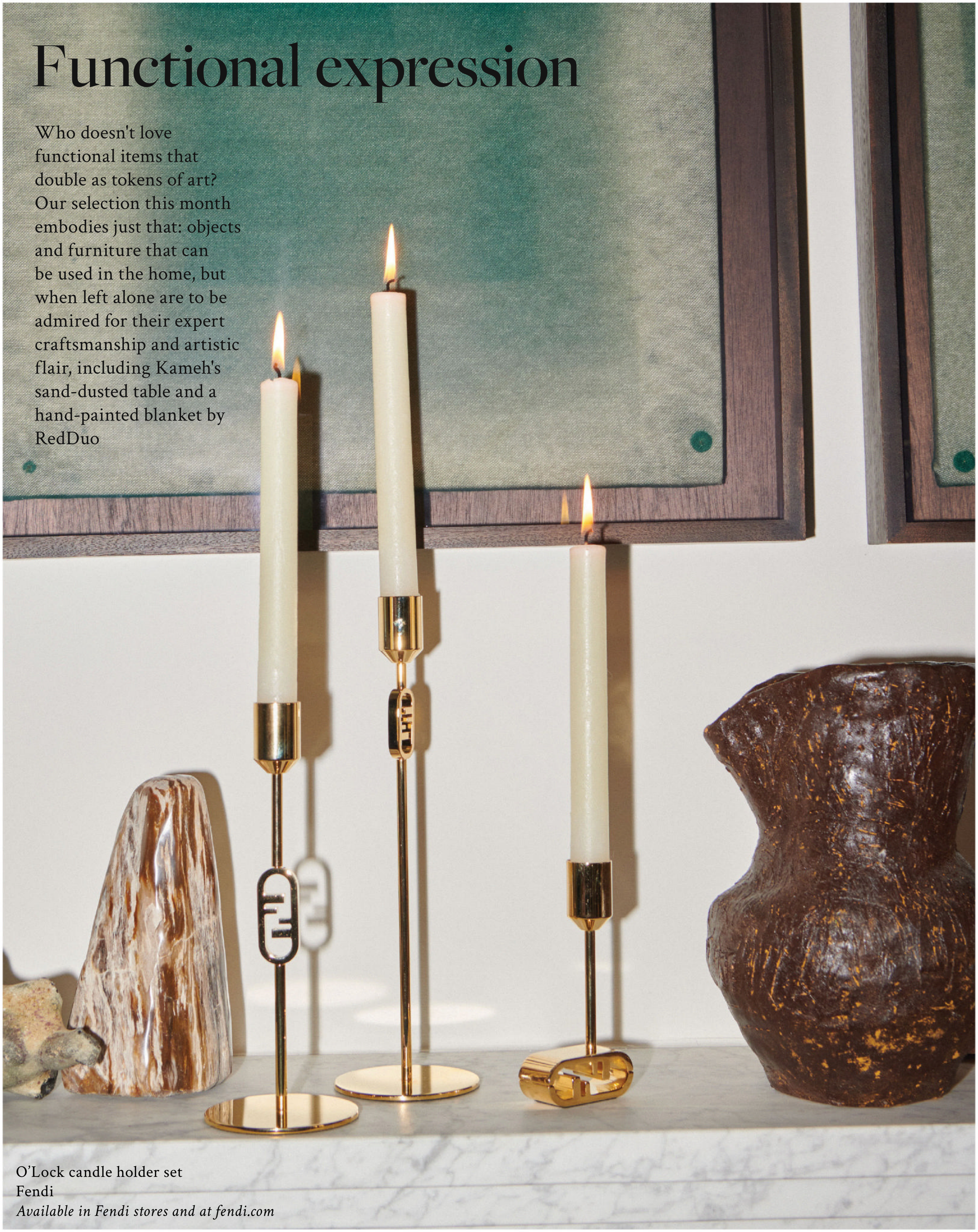
While the island is visited by a cluster of tourists daily, there are no hotels or residences on this idyllic island – except for one. Le Grand Jardin is a private residence comprising a 14,000-square metre sanctuary which dates to the 13th century – and was previously owned by the likes of the 15th-century Duke of Guise and Louis XIV. Legend has it that Napoleon once grazed his horses in its gardens and slept in the tower (now turned into a bedroom for guests) while protecting the south of France.

The exclusive and luxurious residence is ideal for visitors seeking privacy and a connection to nature, who can rent the entire fully staffed property which includes 12 bedrooms across seven separate buildings such as the Governor's House, three cottages, a guest house and the old fortress tower with a surrounding 14,000-square metre botanical park that boasts sweet-smelling citrus trees and natural pools. The clean lines of the modern architectural interventions blend seamlessly with its original features, as preservation was of utmost importance to its renovation, from its architecture to its gardens.

"The core focus has been on preserving the history of the buildings, whilst also adopting modern-day luxuries," the property's team explains. "Original features have been restored, which included using historic drawings of the gardens so they could be returned to their previous grandeur. Inside, every aspect of the design was thoughtfully curated with a focus on sustainability and natural materials. From the white and grey marble and neutral beige furnishings to the teak wood floors, this signature design has created an era-defining hidden sanctuary, with an effortlessly chic feel."

# Functional expression

Who doesn't love functional items that double as tokens of art? Our selection this month embodies just that: objects and furniture that can be used in the home, but when left alone are to be admired for their expert craftsmanship and artistic flair, including Kameh's sand-dusted table and a hand-painted blanket by RedDuo



O'Lock candle holder set
Fendi
*Available in Fendi stores and at fendi.com*

2

1

3

6

5

4

**1.** uncommon matters x H&M Home jewellery stand. *Available at ae.hm.com* **2.** Tekla / Jacquemus sleepwear. *Available at teklafabrics.com* **3.** Table 0.2 by Kameh. *Available at thecollectional.com* **4.** Loads of Lines blanket #1 by RedDuo. *Available at redmilk.space* **5.** Trippy vase by Massproductions. *Available at massproductions.se* **6.** JWDA table lamp by Jonas Wagell for Menu. *Available at mytheresa.com*

# A beautiful life

Lebanese-born, New York-based multi-disciplinary artist – and founder of *Plastik* magazine – Eli Rezkallah has launched his first book, *Life in Plastik*, which is a five-act visual volume exploring the influence of childhood memories on his photography

INTERVIEW BY AIDAN IMANOVA
IMAGES COURTESY OF PLASTIK INC

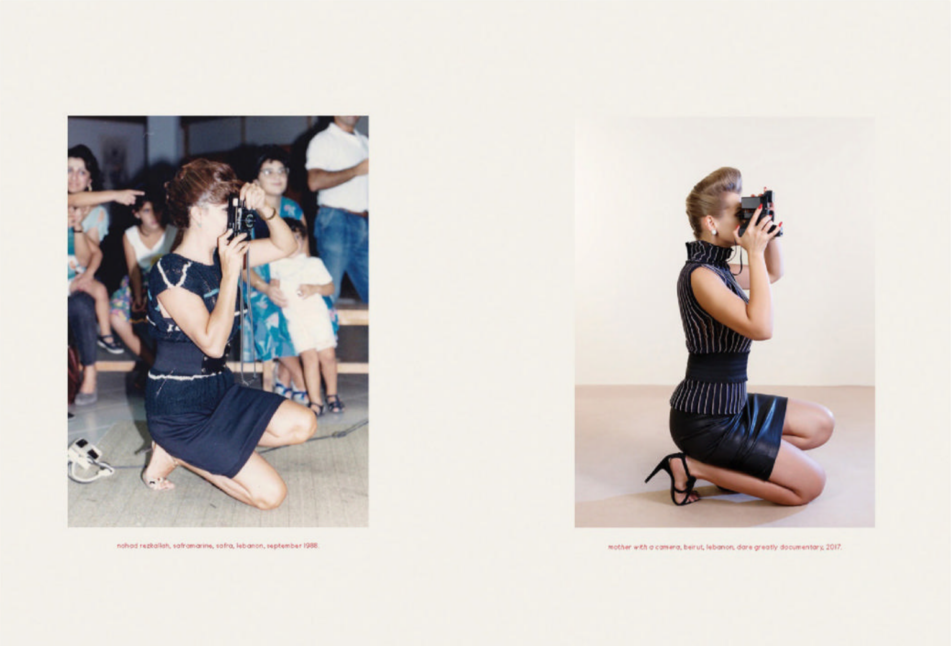
ELI REZKALLAH
life in plastik
Lannoo

**How would you describe the aesthetics behind your images?** From a surface level, strong colours and seamless beauty are a staple of the images I photograph. Yet – and no matter how perfectly manicured my subjects and settings are made out to be – a subtle, powerful sense of dread and irony always exudes from my work. This comes from growing up around my mother and her friends during the Lebanese civil war, where they had to do what they had to do in order to live a semi-normal life – while fear always lingered in the background.

**What do you wish to express with your photography?** Initially, my work was a way for me to add life and colour to the environment I grew up in. However, with enough distance, I found out that most of my work was a more polished recreation of observations I had made during my childhood. After the Lebanese revolution, I feel that my work is heading towards a more activist perspective rather than an observational one: a suggestion of how the world should be.

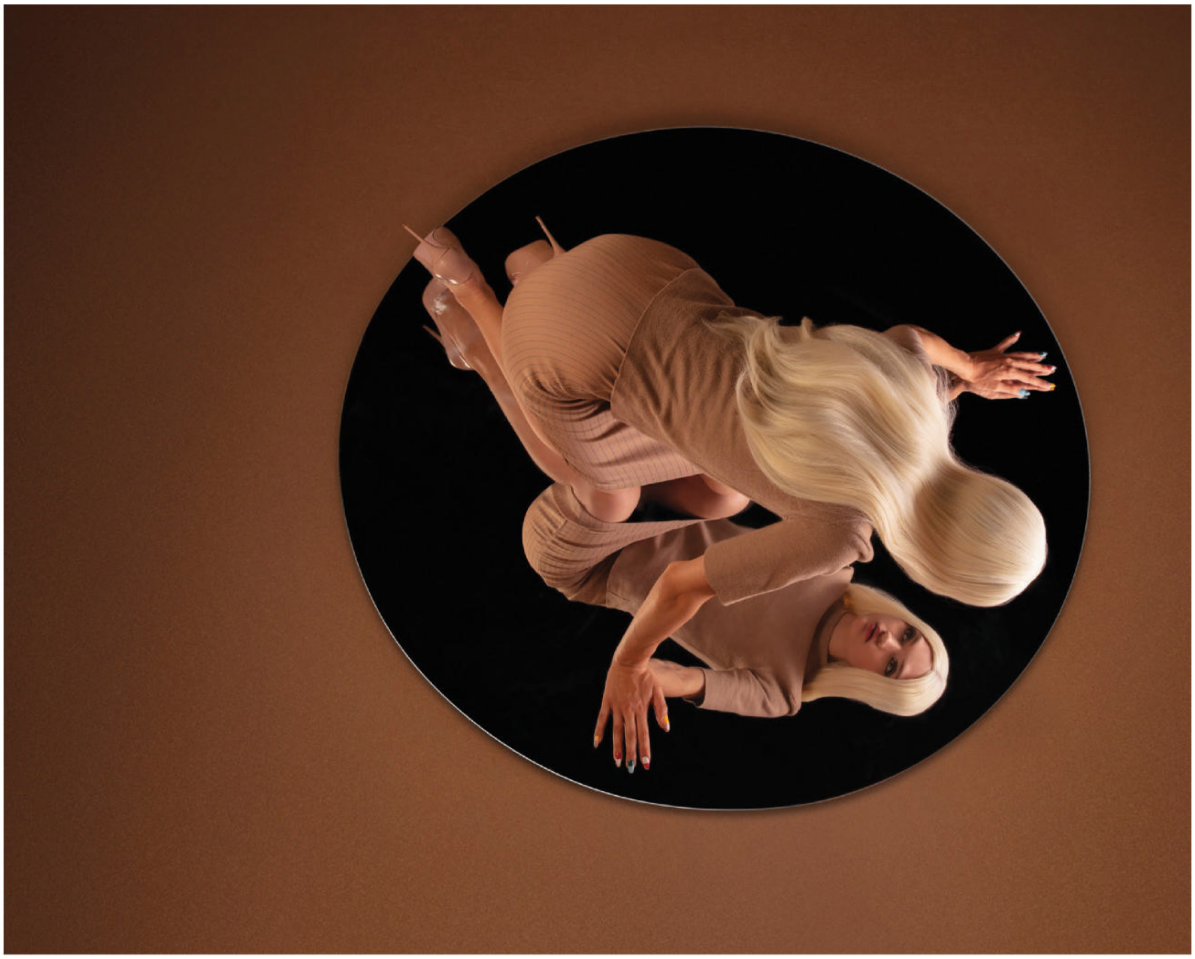
**How have your childhood memories inspired the direction of your images?** It was only a couple of years ago, when I stumbled upon my childhood pictures, that I noticed the uncanny resemblance between the work I create and my childhood growing up. This is actually what inspired me to embark on this journey of creating a book that showcases how my childhood memories inspire my work at *Plastik*. I always say: "*Plastik* is a direct reflection of my soul." Growing up in a secluded oasis around my mother through '90s war-torn Lebanon, I was desensitised to the realities of the world outside. We lived life as if nothing happened. This has affected me throughout my upbringing and influenced my ability to face reality as a creative person in Lebanon. The five chapters of the book – *summer, mother, women, play* and *drag* – take you through this beautiful, nostalgic, yet remnant depiction of who I am; or rather, all the elements that manifested who I have become with time.

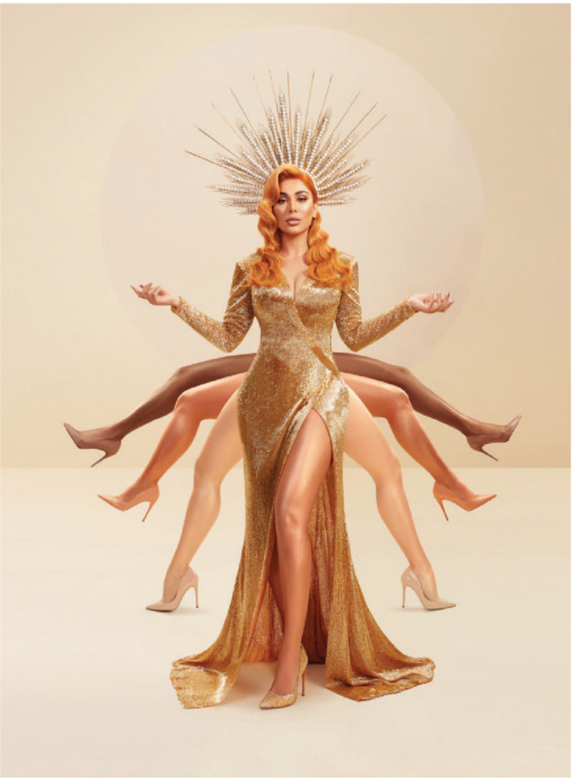
**What does the name of the book signify about your work and the narrative you're telling?** I don't think the book could've been titled anything else: it is symbolic of the concept of living in denial and a perfect depiction of the lives of those I represent in my work. It's also a body of work created by, and for, a world I created myself, so it's my '*life in plastik*' too.

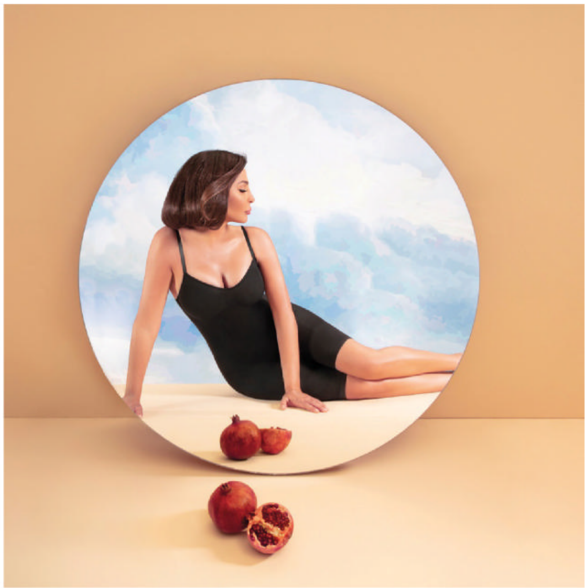


nohad rezkallah, saframarine, sofra, lebanon, september 1988.

mother with a camera, beirut, lebanon, dare greatly documentary, 2017.

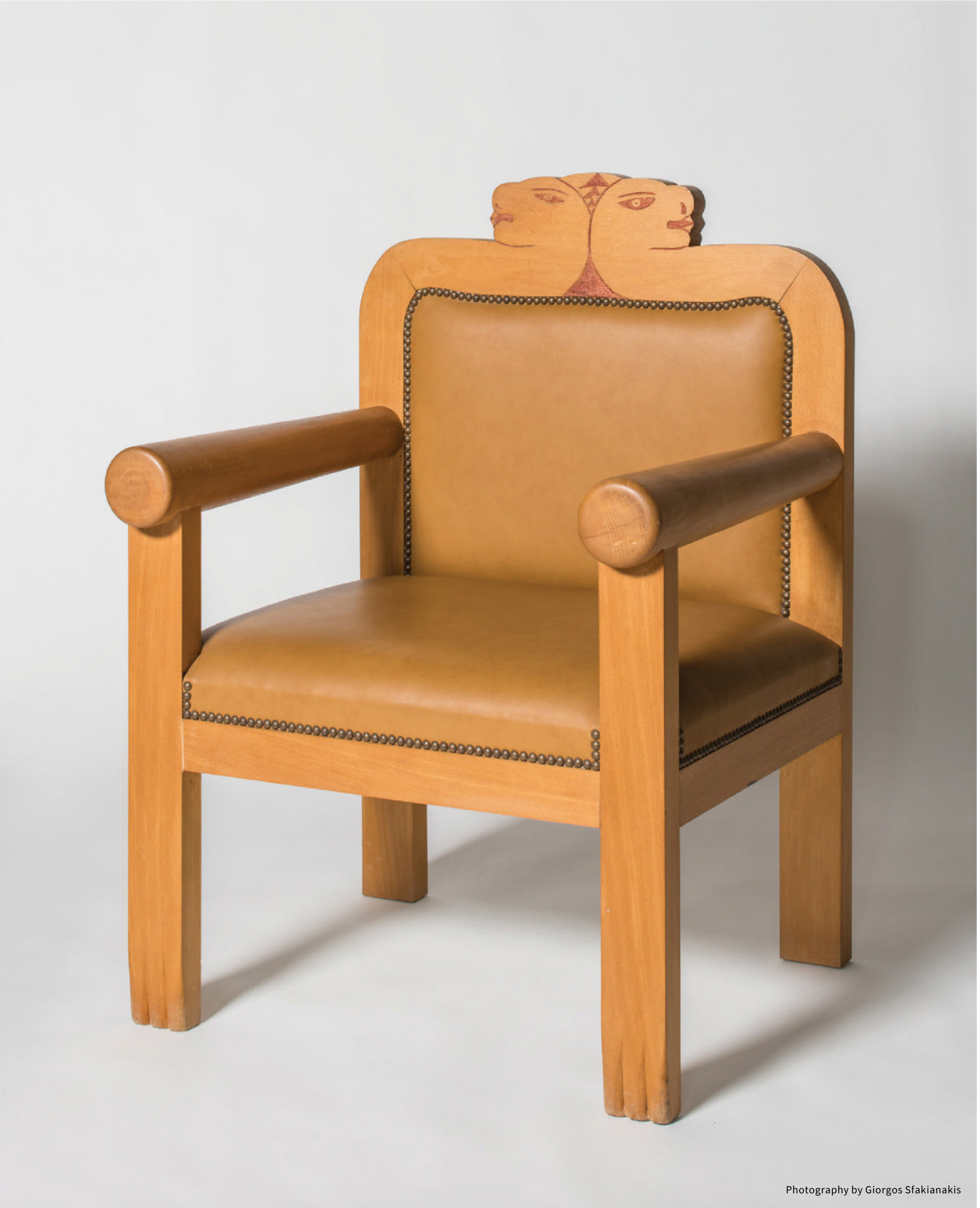






Clockwise from top: 'The Void' by Eli Rezkallah, Beirut, Lebanon, 2018. 'ARRAY OF LIGHT' by Eli Rezkallah, 2019. 'Mother I', Eli Rezkallah, Beirut, Lebanon, 2017

Greek painter Alekos Fassianos' selection of furniture, lighting, ceramics and other design objects is being showcased and later reproduced in small editions by Carwan Gallery, shedding light on the late artist's imaginative creations. His pieces were designed with a deep love for the human body, featuring smooth, rounded edges, natural leathers and materials that are soft to the touch. Each object was designed by hand, to be unique, reflecting Fassianos's resentment of all things mass-produced.



Photography by Giorgos Sfakianakis

# Alekos Fassianos design works by Carwan Gallery

Home in Casablanca designed by Ali Lahlou.
Photography by Omar Tajmouati

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